

CHAPTER 3

Is She or Isn't He?
Plotting Ambiguous Gender



Figure 3.2 Frontispiece of Cuisin, *Clémentine orpheline et androgyne* (1820).
Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The swashbuckling, gender-bending protagonist of J.-P.-R. Cuisin's long-forgotten popular novel, *Clémentine, orpheline et androgyne, ou les caprices de la nature et la fortune* (*Clémentine, Orphan and Androgyne, or the Caprices of Nature and Fortune*) (1820), is rendered in the novel's frontispiece wearing a dress (breasts exposed), while brandishing a sword and declaring, triumphantly: "I am no longer a woman or a man, but a lion" (see Figure 3.2). During the scene in question, Clémentine, unjustly attacked, slays would-be assailants with virtuoso swordsmanship while repudiating the labels of *woman* or *man*.¹ It is Clémentine's righteous anger that affords a space of proud gender nonconformity in this scene, but from the outset Clémentine identifies as a gender outsider: "*Man and woman, destiny said to me; and neither one nor the other* cried nature in time, humiliated and revolted" (1: 3). At first marginalized on the outskirts of the binary, in the heat of battle Clémentine surpasses male and female identity to embody the heart of a lion.

Merriam-Webster recently chose the singular personal pronoun "they" as the word of the year for 2019, noting its skyrocketing use by one person whose "gender identity is nonbinary."² Although gender-neutral pronouns did not yet exist in nineteenth-century France, Rachel Mesch has shown that gender nonconformity certainly did, and "the challenge of finding the right gender pronoun [. . .] has historical precedent."³ Clémentine would certainly be one literary example of such a precedent. In Part I, we saw how doctors like Bouillaud sometimes resorted to the "hermaphroditism of language" in order to describe patients whose bodies did not conform to binary sex.⁴ Others switched between masculine and feminine pronouns, or attempted to side-step the problem entirely by circumlocuting gendered pronouns using periphrasis (such as "the patient," or "the subject"). In this chapter, we will see how novelists deployed many of the same strategies, even creating "hermaphroditic words" (*paroles hermaphrodites*) when faced with the challenge of using gendered pronouns to describe androgynous characters.⁵ Writers experimented with more than just pronouns though. Several of the most famous authors of the nineteenth century wrote entire novels in which the gender of the central protagonist remained in doubt, and actually became the mystery pushing the plot onward. *Clémentine, orpheline et androgyne* was merely the first example of a sudden proliferation of literature that used unknown sex or gender as a motor for plot. Although the rise of hermaphroditism in nineteenth-century literature has often been attributed to mythology, this chapter argues that now-forgotten popular novels (such as *Clémentine*) are important intertexts that enable us to see overlooked connections between the

ways both doctors and novelists used narrative as a means to dissect social and cultural beliefs about binary gender. Like the doctors in Part I who argued that “true sex” was a fiction for some of their patients, this new literary hermaphroditism was predicated upon calling binary gender into question.

Doubtful Sex Driving the Plot

Early in the nineteenth century, while the lowly novel aspired to the repute of its neighboring genres and its function seemed up for grabs, a cluster of texts, both popular and canonical, realist and romantic, were penned about hermaphroditism. The first, as we have seen, was Cuisin's now-obscure *Clémentine, orpheline et androgyne* (1820). Next appeared Henri de Latouche's immensely influential (although today commonly neglected) *Fragoletta, Naples et Paris en 1799* (1829). *Fragoletta* would, in turn, inform Honoré de Balzac's use of androgyny in both *Séraphita* (1834) and *La fille aux yeux d'or* (1835), and Théophile Gautier's masterpiece, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835). These novels would be followed by a later spate of works showcasing androgynous characters, such as Émile Zola's *La curée* (1872), Rachilde's *Monsieur Venus* (1884), and Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À rebours* (1884). In addition to these well-known novels, a number of popular texts also appeared around the fin de siècle with epicene characters and/or intersex protagonists. *Les demi-sexes* (1897) and *Les androgynes* (1903), both by Jane de La Vaudère, investigate blurry boundaries between the sexes and medicine's role in forging these distinctions. In 1885, Gaston d'Hailly published *L'hermaphrodite*, which bears the same title as Armand Dubarry's medico-libertine novel from 1898. Both novels recount the life and trials of an intersex person; however, the former ends on a happy note while the latter culminates with a suicide modeled after Herculine Barbin's own tragic death.

Almost invariably overlooked by critics, popular novels merit closer examination because they enable us to reread canonical texts with a new set of eyes. I will argue that the full stakes of androgyny in works like Balzac's *Séraphita* and Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* can only be appreciated in the context of the now largely forgotten novel *Fragoletta* by Latouche. Moreover, popular fiction incites a revision of longstanding temporal and thematic distinctions separating what has come to be known as “the romantic androgyne” and the “decadent hermaphrodite.” My rereading of canonical literature in light of popular fiction will invite us to reconsider what scholars have long held as the ahistorical “myth of the

androgynous,” which alleges that literary androgyny bears no relation to historical intersex. Contrary to this critical viewpoint, I argue that both popular and canonical works share ties to medicine that are anchored to shifting historical forces within nineteenth-century science.

If, as Peter Brooks has argued, narrative is the dominant nineteenth-century mode of representation and explanation, then novels whose plots rely on ambiguous sex in order to keep us reading reflect not only our desire as readers to progress toward meaning, but also our need as members of a community for models to help us work through social constructs of gender and sexuality.⁶ Like the plethora of plots relying on mysterious gender, the ubiquitous literary “figure of the hermaphrodite” mirrors increasing historical challenges to the binary, and plays into the sociological aim of nineteenth-century novels to reflect the full spectrum of character types.⁷ In this way, gender ambiguity represents a paradigm for the function of the realist text. Regardless of genre, however, the way we read the text is bound up in the way we read gender. This crucial realization enables us to avoid the familiar pitfall of interpreting literary “hermaphroditism” as a constitutive element of any given genre. Because androgyny simultaneously evokes and refutes the binary, it is tempting to see it as a device designed to forge and test the boundaries of genre. And while not without truth, this quality has engendered a number of somewhat circular arguments among critics who study a selection of texts on androgyny within a certain genre and then begin to read androgyny as a reflection of that particular genre.⁸ Representations of androgyny exceed the confines of any single genre, but owing to the extremely pervasive nature of the theme, any literary investigation would necessarily be selective. This chapter analyzes only those works in which unknown sex arguably functions as the central motor of plot. I do this in order to illustrate the range of different authors’ attempts to use historical intersex as a central structuring force in their works, and to reveal similarities with the medical narratives discussed in Part I. Case studies of hermaphroditism find their literary corollaries in those works in which the central character’s gender is unknown, either to the reader, or to other characters.

To varying extents, in well-known novels like *Sarrasine*, *Séraphita*, and *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, the question of gender or sexual identity motivates the plot and holds the reader in suspense until the denouement. This proves equally true in less well-known novels like *Fragoletta*, and even in forgotten ones such as Cuisin’s *Clémentine* and in d’Hailly’s *L’hermaphrodite*. This suspense promises a temporary excursion away from sexual difference, captivating the curious reader, but ultimately sublimates such “dangerous” forays,

allowing for the reestablishment of heteronormative values which had at first seemed threatened. As Roland Barthes remarked in reference to *Sarrasine*, in these novels, ambiguous sex becomes the most basic textual enigma or “hermeneutic code,” which invites the reader to continue reading.⁹

Each novel provides a different strategy for working through situations that challenge a nineteenth-century society built upon the cultural belief in sexual difference. In Balzac's *Séraphîta*, the androgynous creature Séraphîtus/Séraphîta is desired both as a man and a woman by his/her two admirers, Minna and Wilfred. Before any kind of love can be consummated, we discover that the androgyne is not really of this world at all, but rather an angel. Séraphîta seems, at first, to tidily resolve all conflict by dying and allowing Minna and Wilfred to discover love for one another. Balzac treats readers to all sorts of scintillating innuendo but ultimately saves them from a “guilty conscience” through a heteronormative/religious ending. Ascension (*Séraphîta*), death (*Fragoletta*), an apparent revelation of “true sex” (*Sarrasine*), and separation (*Mademoiselle de Maupin*) are all literary strategies used by the novel to sublimate danger to earthly binaries.

Yet, there is also a sense in which all of these novels subvert their own efforts to contain and control as if to unconsciously affirm real-world diversity. In *Sarrasine*, for example, the artist dies (as “punishment” for his homosexual desire?) but androgynous Zambinella lives on. In fact, the castrato becomes a famous courtesan whose prostitution constitutes the ill-gotten source of the Lanty family's mysterious wealth. (And the *raison d'être* for the entire novella since the narrator's explanation of the identity of the gorgeous figure in the painting and of the ghostly old man is the pretext for the telling of the story in the first place.) The inherent tension between a normalizing ending that at first appears to eliminate the “threat” of androgyny, but that upon closer examination actually undermines clear binary distinctions between men and women, can be read as another fictional corollary to the often-unsuccessful efforts to determine “true sex” in the medical field. In this way too, literature engages with the historical debate that we saw raging in the medical and legal fields in the initial two chapters.

Historicizing the “Myth of the Androgyne”

Scholars have relegated the vertiginous rise of hermaphroditism in nineteenth-century French literature to the realm of myth despite a simultaneous increase of medical and scientific works on the subject. Heavily invested in the mythological origins and symbolic functions of

“hermaphroditism,” these critics have overlooked the history of medicine in favor of the ahistorical “myth of the hermaphrodite.”¹⁰ Influenced by the Jungian “archetype of the collective unconscious,” critics Marie Delcourt and Mircea Eliade argue that the “hermaphrodite” is a “myth” forming part of our “universal” imagination, bearing no relation to living intersex people.¹¹ Echoing Delcourt, A. J. L. Busst suggests that the “myth of the androgyne” holds timeless and universal appeal: “the conception and representation of androgynous men and gods figure prominently in almost every religion and mythology of practically every country and age.”¹²

The problem with these studies, as Frédéric Monneyron points out, is that they do little to explain the reemergence of androgyny as a theme in the nineteenth century proper.¹³ Monneyron’s work investigates the cultural and historical forces affecting the resurgence of hermaphroditism in literature. One of these forces is medicine, but although Monneyron briefly recognizes the simultaneity of medical investigations of hermaphroditism and literary portrayals, he does not scrutinize the medical record. Because this link has not been explored in detail or throughout the entire century, the “myth of the androgyne” is long overdue for critical reevaluation.

According to Busst’s analysis, because “true hermaphrodites” “do not exist,” they cannot find novelistic expression:

However, Maupin is not and cannot be perfectly androgynous, for the true hermaphrodite is too far removed from reality to be represented otherwise than imperfectly by a living character in a novel which aspires to any degree of realism. And it is precisely because it does not truly exist in reality that the hermaphrodite [. . .] is so beautiful. (41–42)

Busst’s sources led him to this conclusion. Because he considers no popular novels, he assumes that fictional representations of intersex never depict “true hermaphrodites,” and because he neglects the medical record, he does not acknowledge that “hermaphrodites” existed in the nineteenth century, just as intersex people exist today. Busst also conceived of this sentence in the 1960s, at the peak of a time during which intersex had become virtually invisible since medical protocol dictated that the bodies of intersex children be shaped to align with binary gender very soon after birth through medical treatment. Following John Money’s now-debunked research in the 1950s, doctors recommended that children never be informed about their diagnosis, and the full truth was often withheld from parents as well. The Epilogue to this book explores how the intersex rights movement finally brought about the rejection of Money’s theories and gave rise to new medical protocols for intersex patients. In this way, perhaps Busst’s own historical moment blinded him

to seeing intersex as anything other than an imaginative myth. Whereas Busst claims that fictional representations “owed practically nothing to biological or scientific observations,” I will show that medicine and science do play key roles in a number of novels (1). Moreover, Busst’s allegation about the unrelated nature of literature and medicine betrays a view of science as an objective reflection of reality, whereas, as illustrated in Chapter 1, nineteenth-century science on hermaphroditism frequently engaged in the same imaginative fantasies as fictional accounts.

A second hallmark of scholarship on the “myth of the androgyne” is a neat temporal and thematic distinction separating what has come to be known as the “romantic androgyne” and the “decadent hermaphrodite.” According to Busst, literature represented the “myth of androgyne” differently in each half of the century: the early, idealized androgyne in the first half of the century, which Busst calls “healthy and optimistic,” can be contrasted with a decadent, “pessimistic” representation of hermaphroditism in the second half, described as “unhealthy” (10). The two literary representations of androgyne are diametrically opposed for Busst, so that early romantic portrayals symbolizing progress, redemption, unity, solidarity, virginity, and harmony find their “exact antithesis” in later portrayals resonating degeneration, damnation, fragmentation, individualism, promiscuity, and disaccord (11). Similarly, Eliade argues that the symbol of androgyne “degrades” at the *fin de siècle*, as materialism and eroticism replace spiritualism.¹⁴

One problem with such polarized extremes is that most authors stubbornly refuse to gravitate to them in a consistent way. Medical efforts to classify ambiguous bodies in the nineteenth century met with a similar fate. As we saw in Part I, try as they might, medical and legal experts were routinely unable to categorize historical intersex people as either male or female without fierce polemics. Even Busst had to admit that not all writers fit easily into each category (Balzac, for example) and that there was a period of overlap during which both types could be found (12).¹⁵ Nevertheless, he situates a shift around 1850 – though the motivations for the selection of this year remain inexplicit (38). In Busst’s timeline, as disillusionment gradually replaced early optimism, pervasive dissatisfaction with everyday life led to escapism through literature (40). A clear separation between romantic androgynes and decadent hermaphrodites remains an underlying presupposition in many works, both literary and historical, even though scholars have drawn attention to the misleading nature of such dichotomies. This chapter offers new evidence that popular literature on hermaphroditism further erodes critical distinctions dividing androgyne in the first and second halves of the century.

Clémentine: The First Popular “Hermaphrodite”

If Cuisin’s 1820 novel, *Clémentine, orpheline et androgyne*, were the only nineteenth-century work on hermaphroditism, nothing any literary critic has ever said about representations of “hermaphroditism” in literature would be true. Here is a novel composed nearly a decade before *Fragoletta*, the work nearly always cited as the first in a long line of novels about intersex. *Clémentine* also purposefully engages with medical discourse on hermaphroditism half a century before authors like Huysmans and Zola would fashion fiction out of medical representations of sex and sexuality at the fin de siècle. Nor can one describe *Clémentine* as an idealized androgyne handed down from mythology (as are supposedly prevalent in the early part of the century). Like her decadent counterparts, *Clémentine* is a “hermaphrodite de nature,” quite unlike Gautier’s transging Mademoiselle de Maupin, with whom brave *Clémentine* nevertheless shares an affinity for swordplay, as we have seen (1: 5).¹⁶

Despite the polemical relationship of Cuisin’s novel to longstanding literary criticism, *Clémentine, orpheline et androgyne* already somehow contains nearly every theme and seemingly many of the same scenes that will later come to be exploited in future works on hermaphroditism: cross-dressing, androgyny, incest, mistaken identity, *mise en abyme*, meta-theatre, medical discourse, and performative gender. *Clémentine* also poignantly brings to the fore the typically complex resonances between fiction and historical fact. By raising the thorny question of influence, it also sets the stage nicely for the onslaught of androgynous characters appearing in the 1830s and stretching on to the fin de siècle.

Like the later popular novel, *L’hermaphrodite* (1898), by Armand Dubarry, Cuisin’s story is recounted in the first person from an intersex protagonist’s point of view, and details the difficulties of a marginalized person endeavoring to integrate into society and to find love. The novel contains the two-volume adventures of the “hermaphrodite” *Clémentine*, who suffers cruelly until at last finding love and marriage to an open-minded marquis. Claiming to have discovered the “real memoirs” of a historical intersex person, Cuisin rehearses the familiar eighteenth-century convention of fiction passing itself off as fact. (This is the same strategy that Gautier will later adopt for his epistolary novel about the cross-dressing Mademoiselle de Maupin, and the one employed by Gaston d’Hailly in his 1885 novel, *L’hermaphrodite*.) Like Pierre de Marivaux’s Marianne, *Clémentine* is a humble orphan, raised first by a benevolent parish priest, whose quest to uncover the secret of her birth becomes a central, if often interrupted, aim of the novel. Also called *Clémentina* by others, *Clémentine* is predominately feminine-gendered in the French text. Like

Marianne, Clémentine feels herself to be noble, and just like Marivaux's heroine, her elevated sentiments inspire the selfsame belief in her entourage. Clémentine's suspicions eventually find confirmation when a treasure chest is unearthed containing a limitless fortune and, more importantly, documentation of her name and family. As it turns out, the secret of Clémentine's origins will also answer the riddle of her mixed-sex body. It seems that Clémentine's mother imprudently fantasized about the visiting Ambassador of Persia during pregnancy, while simultaneously hoping for a daughter, which, following the longstanding "scientific" belief in "maternal impressions," produced Clémentine's half-male/half-female person.¹⁷ Popular scientific belief often linked exoticism and hermaphroditism with the claim that temperature increases affected genital development – a belief that would find its way into racist justifications for France's colonialism in Africa.¹⁸

Clémentine stands in opposition to literary scholars who generally situate medicalized fictional narratives at the end of the century, for science and medicine play a crucial role in the novel. Likely because of Michel Foucault's enduring influence, along with Busst's temporal and thematic distinction between the "romantic androgyne" and the "decadent hermaphrodite," much literary criticism perpetuates the idea that fictional representations of hermaphroditism are unrelated to clinical discourse until the fin de siècle.¹⁹ Nevertheless, just like the "medico-libertine" genre Foucault identifies in the 1880s, *Clémentine* already rehearses what will become a familiar tension between self-knowledge, on the one hand, and medically imposed knowledge on the other. Yet Cuisin makes no attempt to reconcile these two epistemologies, and his novel does not purport to resolve, or even acknowledge lingering questions about "true sex" preoccupying future writers.

An infant washed ashore in a tempest that swallowed her vessel along with her past, Clémentine is raised by Juan Mathias, a charitable parish priest in a small Spanish village. Too young for language when she is found and too old to remember once she can speak, Clémentine grows up in relative isolation, sheltered from superstitious villagers and the "truth" about her body, which is concealed from her by Juan Mathias. Clémentine's guardian extols the virtues of resignation and monastic life in the hope that his ward will perpetually defer self-awareness by joining a convent. Now an adult, Clémentine the narrator is able to reflect on her upbringing and realize that her inability to decipher Juan Mathias's intentions derived from the fact that "I did not know myself at all during that time" (1: 12). Brutal self-discovery dawns when Clémentine overhears Juan Mathias conversing with Don Anzelmo Maëstro, a famous doctor from Cadix. Alerted by the passing murmurs and prolonged stares of fellow villagers that something is amiss, Clémentine listens in on the men's

conversation hoping to learn “the key to the enigmatic behavior” of those around her (1: 17). However, from her hiding spot behind the bookcase, Clémentine is only able to make out part of the phrase “beautiful Clémentine is . . . *dite*” (1: 18). The trauma of Clémentine’s eventual realization is such that the mere mention of words ending with “ite” later send her into spasms of terror.²⁰ As she listens in, Clémentine is filled with mounting anxiety. She learns that despite her extraordinary talents, her body somehow places her at odds with society: “excluded from one sex without belonging positively to the other, nature would have her dedicate her days to piety and silence, while on the other hand her qualities and talents seem to mark her in advance for a distinguished place in the world” (1: 19). Now panicked, Clémentine watches as the doctor hurries to the bookcase, heaving the Académie’s dictionary off the shelf to read the entry for “hermaphrodite.” Clémentine must learn the meaning of “the word whose frightening ending was *dite*” (1: 20):

Yes, *Hermaphrodite*, cried out the doctor in turn, here it is, noun and adjective [...] from the Greek *Hermes*, Mercury, and *Aphrodite*, Venus, one who participates in Mercury and Venus, who is male and female; who unites the two sexes; it is said of animals and plants. Ah! Continued the doctor [...]. I remember, he said quite crudely, having seen some of them in my travels in Italy and Germany; I even have one in my dissection amphitheater. (1: 21–22)²¹

Clémentine watches horrified as the doctor, temporarily overwhelmed by exciting potential advances to science, seems at first to “rejoice in my monstrosity,” proposing to examine Clémentine’s anatomy, but then returns “little by little to human feelings” (1: 22). Later, he spares Clémentine from provincial superstition and narrow-mindedness by spiriting her away to the city of Cadix to live with his family (1: 22–23).

Despite its early publication date, *Clémentine* is rife with (mostly pejorative) references to medicine. To her disgust, Clémentine will eventually discover the “dissected hermaphrodite” in Maestro’s anatomy laboratory, whom she sees as a “sister,” and a cautionary tale of placing one’s trust in medical men. Later, Clémentine must also refuse a contract for 100,000 francs to be displayed before doctors all over Europe – a practice in which some historical intersex people actually engaged during the nineteenth century in order to earn a living.²² This frenetic quest for scientific knowledge which temporarily sweeps up even Dr. Maestro, places the century’s early scientific positivism under scrutiny and raises questions about the individual costs of furthering collective knowledge. Once his initial scientific exuberance has subsided, Maestro offers a humanist counterweight to the sensationalist, money-driven quackery that characterizes the dark underbelly of contemporary

medicine as it is presented elsewhere in the novel.²³ Maëstro endeavors to shield Clémentine from more invasive scientific study, and he himself never examines her medically, making it clear that he serves as protector rather than physician. The doctor even abandons his family in order to relocate Clémentine when her secret is discovered in Cadix and a team of local medical men circulate a brochure detailing Clémentine's anatomy around Europe. The humiliation and pain of Clémentine's examination is merely hinted at in the text, but foreshadows Barbin's own description.

Cuisin's clearly pejorative view of medicine and his ambivalent representation of Dr. Maëstro will become a mainstay of realist fiction from Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* to Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* cycle and beyond.²⁴ Mary Donaldson-Evans and others have shown that the relatively more complex relationship between writers and doctors in the nineteenth century (than that which existed in the burlesque representations of medicine in Molière's time, for example) reflects medicine's growing respectability during the same period. As the century's early positivism gave way to increasing disillusionment, fictional representations became increasingly skeptical of the abilities of medical men.²⁵ Cuisin's novel negotiates a somewhat anomalous position with respect to this trajectory, since Dr. Maëstro's miraculous medical abilities exemplify contemporary scientific confidence, while other, more nefarious doctors such as the team in Cadix appear motivated solely by financial gain, or operate with callous disregard for their patients. Dr. Maëstro's art nevertheless outstrips historical ability when he administers a vegetable cream that inhibits the growth of Clémentine's otherwise abundant facial hair (I: 98–99).²⁶

Despite Maëstro's medical wizardry, Cadix proves no haven from the libel Clémentine's body attracts. Clémentine's "masculine" vigor and striking profile awaken the aspirations of a homely antagonist named Donna Marcellina, who cannot resist the peerless swordsman. The scorn of the handsome chevalier transforms Donna Marcellina into a persistent enemy whom Cuisin brings back whenever things start to look up for Clémentine. Pursued across Spain and into France by rumor, Clémentine must also dodge prospective lovers, for all who lay eyes on her, it seems, fall hopelessly in love. This proves true regardless of whether Clémentine chooses masculine or feminine attire, imperiling identity and virtue alike.

In one scene, after Clémentine has fled the convent where she had sought refuge following a dazzling display of swordplay that left several policemen seemingly dead by her hand, she intends to marry a French nobleman who has loved her for some time, in the full knowledge of her

bodily variation. Clémentine has uncharacteristically let her facial hair grow unimpeded and donned masculine attire in order to facilitate travel, and so when a maid walks in on Clémentine and Saint-Elme in a passionate embrace, she stumbles upon two bearded “men,” lips locked (2: 104–5).²⁷ Surprisingly, this seemingly transgressive tableau merely provides momentary pause and affords comic relief for the lovers who find the maid’s shock humorous, and Saint-Elme, who has been professing his love to an apparent man since their escape, seems neither daunted by his androgynous bride/groom-to-be nor by her evident superiority in the masculine realm (she bested him with the sword). This all may seem miraculous given the hostile reaction of the general public to successive revelations of Clémentine’s anatomy, but Saint-Elme, who turns out to be Clémentine’s long-lost brother – making the above scene doubly transgressive – is not the only lover Clémentine charms. She will eventually marry the Marquis de Saint-Réal whose actions prevent what would have been an incestuous marriage with her brother, and whose unflappable lovelorn attentions will eventually win him a most unusual partner.²⁸

If I have lingered over the plot of Cuisin’s obscure novel, it is to illustrate its similarities with the classics to follow. Readers will have already detected many of them. Clémentine and Saint-Elme represent early avatars of the semi-incestuous brother and sister pair anchoring Balzac’s *La fille aux yeux d’or*.²⁹ In the same work, De Marsay’s long-lost sister, the Marquise de Saint-Réal, shares a similar name with Cuisin’s Marquis de Saint-Réal. Moreover, Clémentine’s first governess hails by the intriguing name Séraphine, resonating with Séraphîta for whom Balzac’s only novel about a “hermaphrodite” is named, as well as Sarrasine, the castrato of his eponymous novella. Variations of a convent scene in which Clémentine arouses the affections of the Mother Superior also reappear in Herculine Barbin’s memoirs and Armand Dubarry’s novel, and monastic life plays a part in almost every other work on hermaphroditism from *Fragoletta* to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* to Gaston d’Hailly’s *L’hermaphrodite* (see Figure 3.3).

The swashbuckling, androgynous central character from *Clémentine* is inherited by *Fragoletta* and passed on to Gautier.³⁰ Like Clémentine, Théodore/Madeleine proves irresistible to all who look on them in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* – a constant also observed by Balzac in *Séraphîta*. Yet, in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Gautier fully exploits the then scandalous tension of apparent homoeroticism between d’Albert and Théodore rather than glossing over it as does Cuisin. Having already portrayed this trope in *Séraphîta*, Balzac offers the mirror image in



Figure 3.3 Clémentine, in Convent. Frontispiece of vol. 2 of Cuisin, *Clémentine orpheline et androgyne* (1883).

Sarrasine, when an apparently heterosexual attraction is revealed as masked homosexual desire. Moreover, many fictional representations of androgyny rely on some kind of *mise en abyme* to draw out important leitmotifs. In *Clémentine*, *Phaedra* becomes a literary foil intended to alert Clémentine to the potential incest with her brother (which Balzac resuscitates for the same purpose in *La fille aux yeux d'or*).³¹ Zola also rewrites *Phaedra*'s tragedy in *La curée* in the incestuous relationship between the "strange hermaphrodite" Maxime, and his stepmother. Both *Fragoletta* and *Mademoiselle de Maupin* incorporate theater as a mirror to reflect the central themes of the novel. *Fragoletta* recruits political satire to address the historical subplot of the Neapolitan Revolution of 1799, while *Mademoiselle de Maupin* relies on a showing of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* to rehearse the cross-dressing and gender-bending crux of the main plot. The Pygmalion myth, no doubt because of the importance of hermaphroditism in the plastic arts, bears mentioning in almost every work.

Relatively little is known about the author of *Clémentine* beyond what can be found in pithy nineteenth-century bibliographies. Born in 1777, he died a pauper around 1845, although even the year of his death is uncertain.³² He claimed variously to be a former soldier, writer, and curator of an anatomy cabinet – the last of which might explain his fascination with hermaphroditism.³³ An 1883 review of the novel, published on the occasion of a reprint, labels Cuisin "un écrivassier," which translates as a prolific, but terrible writer.³⁴ The reviewer goes on to describe him as "one of the most prolific plagiarists of the first half of the century," whose over seventy novels assured him "no more immortality after death than they procured him fortune during life" (*ibid.*). The reviewer deems *Clémentine* a "very unrealistic" novel about a young girl who "unites on her person the attributes of both sexes" (794).

Contemporary bookseller Nicolas-Alexandre Pigoreau, on the other hand, describes Cuisin as "full of cleverness, imagination, and ease" in 1821.³⁵ Nevertheless, Pigoreau discourages reading Cuisin (along with Rousseau and Voltaire) to all but "mature" men because "such liquor as fortifies old age intoxicates youth" (351). He describes Cuisin as moralizing, but the risk of misinterpretation means the author's work is only safe in the hands of adult men: "all of his works have a moral and useful goal" (174).

Indeed, Cuisin's novel is overtly moralizing, but not in the ways that later fiction has taught us to expect. Rather than killing off his protagonist in a final return to heteronormativity, Clémentine lives happily ever after. Though Clémentine embodies her mother's sin – the kind of preordained suffering or hereditary "taint" that so overshadows Zola's work – the overt homoeroticism of the novel never provokes reprimand or redress. The

surprising moral of the story is that God created all creatures of this world, and only God may determine the length of their stay. Living in virtue is the divine commandment to all. Because Clémentine trusts in God's design and doesn't finally end it all in a crisis of despair, she is rewarded with a happy, albeit sterile hearth.

It is probably Cuisin's notion of morality more than any other inconsistency that secures the ire of his fin-de-siècle reviewer, for by that time, readers had learned to anticipate that an author mete out punishment differently. From Balzac and Gautier, one had come to expect that androgynes had no place in this world: they either ascended or absconded, died or disappeared. No doubt conditioned by previous reading, the reviewer even goes so far as to impose a "true sex" onto Cuisin's protagonist, in what can only be described as a blatant misreading of the novel's enduring insistence on Clémentine's dual identity throughout:

Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, it seems that she really belongs to the weaker sex. One can see what advantages the author could draw from this physical conformation: inspiring and feeling in turn extraordinary passions, Clémentine, ever virtuous, even in the most unbelievable circumstances, ends up becoming the happy wife of a man whom she had distinguished from the outset, simultaneously recovering immense fortune and a family she had not dreamed up.³⁶

It is as if the 1883 reviewer remained stubbornly unable to interpret a novel that, at its most basic level, defied binary sex. Historically, such stubbornness makes sense, given the decades of novels conditioning the belief that intersex desire was always fraught.

Historical Intersex Figures

Because of the role of censorship and the fact that none of the canonical authors mention Cuisin specifically, gauging the influence of *Clémentine* proves difficult.³⁷ It is perhaps conceivable that later literary representations of hermaphroditism simply drew from the same historical wellspring as Cuisin, in addition to referencing each other in a great intertextual web. Although it is often stressed that Gautier was not preoccupied with historical accuracy, his character Mademoiselle de Maupin of course bears a famous historical precedent. The cross-dressing, dueling, bisexual exploits of Julie d'Aubigny de Maupin (1670/1673–1707) still garnered popular acclaim in the 1830s, judging from the contemporary press.³⁸ Perhaps "the real" Mademoiselle de Maupin motivated the sword-wielding protagonists from Cuisin to Latouche

to Gautier to Gaston d'Hailly. Another historical figure who captured the popular imagination was the "Chevalier/ière d'Éon," whose exploits were memorialized around the turn of the nineteenth century with an edition of Éon's memoirs.³⁹ An emissary of Louis X, the Chevalier d'Éon fooled foreign dignitaries with cross-dressing, and provoked considerable speculation about sexual identity. The Abbé de Choisy (1644–1724) and the surgeon James Barry (1795–1865) are other potential historical sources.⁴⁰ Even George Sand, that female writer who, under a masculine pseudonym, outsold every one of her male contemporaries (including Balzac), was often likened to a "hermaphrodite." In *Les Chants de Maldoror*, comte de Lautréamont refers to Sand with the epithet "the circumcised hermaphrodite" (339–40). Madeleine Fargeaud reveals that Balzac's description of Béatrix, one of his many androgynous characters, borrows from Sand's descriptions of herself as "neither" a "woman" nor a "man," but rather a "being" (l'être), the very same periphrasis that Balzac had also used in *Séraphita*.⁴¹ Tales of hermaphrodites and gender-bending cross-dressers reappear in nineteenth-century newspaper articles and in pamphlets that may also have inspired novelists. In 1859, for example, Hérail published a brochure on *Mademoiselle Savalette de Lange*, a man who, disguised as a woman, reached the highest echelon of Parisian society and captivated the popular imagination. Hérail's shifting use of pronouns and double-entendre betrays the literary inspiration of his project, while his extensive appeal (he claims 3,000 readers in Paris) suggests that fascination with hermaphroditism extended well beyond literature.

As all of these examples show, however, that even when historical figures may have inspired fictional counterparts, their "real" life exploits had already arrived in the newspapers, spiced with the same imaginative flavor and recounted with the same sensational verve as the great androgyne novels from Latouche on to the fin de siècle. As we saw in the last chapter, if the sexual identity of historical figures sparked intense debate and even complicated legal proceedings, the sexual identity of fictional characters would become an equal source of speculation, and therefore a seemingly perpetual mainspring for plot.

Latouche's *Fragoletta* and the Enigma of the Recumbent Hermaphrodite

Hyacinthe-Joseph Alexandre de Latouche, or simply "Henri" de Latouche (1785–1851), was a poet, novelist, and newspaperman more often remembered for his famous friends than for his own literary corpus. Latouche rubbed shoulders with nearly all the literary greats of the early nineteenth century,

including Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Hugo, Vigny, and Stendhal. He supported both Sand and Balzac before they were known. When Balzac met Latouche in 1825, the future mastermind of *La Comédie humaine* was no more than a failed poet, writer of melodrama, and struggling novelist. Balzac received advice and financial support from Latouche, and they even shared a home briefly in 1827.⁴² Of all of Latouche's volatile friendships (including his on-again, off-again extramarital affair with the poet Marceline Desbordes-Valmore), this last one with Balzac has attracted the most attention. This is due to the ambiguous nature of their friendship, and the resounding influence of androgyny on Balzac's corpus.⁴³ It is worth remembering, however, that contrary to popular belief, Latouche's *Fragoletta: Naples et Paris en 1799* (1829) is not the first nineteenth-century novel with a protagonist whom we might today consider intersex.⁴⁴ As we have seen, Cuisin's *Clémentine* (1820) claims that title almost a decade earlier. But unlike *Clémentine*, we know for certain that Latouche's sprawling historical novel *Fragoletta* did, in fact, influence both Balzac and Gautier.

Graham Robb describes Latouche as "the man who almost became the male companion Balzac dreamed of finding."⁴⁵ Yet Balzac's lukewarm evaluation of *Fragoletta* in the early summer of 1829 was a catalyst for the eventual falling out of the two friends who had been decorating a home together.⁴⁶ In an apparently unsuccessful effort to placate his friend, Balzac also authored a review of Latouche's novel in December 1829, titled "On the Historical Novel and Fragoletta."⁴⁷ Latouche had been Balzac's financial backer, agent, and editor while publishing his early novel, *Le dernier Chouan* (later to become *Les Chouans*), and the older author never forgave the younger his ingratitude. Their relationship would continue to disintegrate and was marked by considerable acrimony in later years. Balzac memorably shredded a copy of Latouche's *Léo* in 1840, and Latouche would allege that Balzac's "vision had never recovered" from "observ[ing] the world through the little window of a W.C."⁴⁸

Despite the current obscurity of Latouche's work, *Fragoletta* enjoyed relative success when it was published in 1829.⁴⁹ Several theatrical spin-offs followed the novel (a sure sign of literary success at the time), and Latouche's more illustrious contemporaries (Gautier, Maxime du Camp, Vigny, Maurice Barrès, and even Joséphin Péladan at the fin de siècle) eulogized the enduring influence of *Fragoletta*.⁵⁰ As a journalist, Gautier covered one vaudeville interpretation of *Fragoletta*, and was struck by the "grace of the hermaphrodite," a feature he sought to emulate with his own *Mademoiselle de Maupin*.⁵¹ The Théodore/Madeleine pair in Gautier's masterpiece is inspired by the Philippe/Camille pair in Latouche's novel,

and Balzac also cites *Fragoletta* as the catalyst for *Séraphita*. Beyond the nineteenth century, however, the few critics who do mention Latouche generally confine their observations to a grudging acknowledgment that Balzac and Gautier owe a debt of inspiration to his pioneering use of androgyny in *Fragoletta*. Backhanded compliments about Latouche's beleaguered personal life and sporadic moments of genius ensue, such that the overarching importance of *Fragoletta* on the canon has been for too long overlooked.⁵²

Summarizing *Fragoletta* is no easy task. Balzac warned: "May he who has the audacity to write a review of this novel after reading it do so. I shall not dare to do it," and Sainte-Beuve described the novel as "an impossible book to analyze."⁵³ In the most acerbic contemporary review of *Fragoletta*, Gustave Planche bemoaned the novel's style and organization, describing it as "a royally annoying, disconnected book without logic, without beginning, and without end, written in a pretentious and affected style."⁵⁴ Though clearly venomous, Planche's assessment of the novel's coherence is not without a certain element of truth. This expansive, double-volume historical novel recounts the story of d'Hauteville, a French soldier embroiled in the military campaign in Naples at the turn of the nineteenth century, who is, moreover, unknowingly in love with an intersex person. At least that is one interpretation of Latouche's mysterious character, Fragoletta. Seemingly endless digressions, frequent bouts of dialogue, and myriad secondary characters interrupt this central plot. Through it all, Latouche adamantly refuses to spell out the gender of his epicene protagonist. The preface of *Fragoletta* promises "a mystery that is not meant to be understood" – a vow to which the novel will hold.⁵⁵

A sometimes rambling novel, *Fragoletta* nevertheless reveals the occasional nugget of genius in which the novel's entire purpose seems distilled and condensed into one scene. The most poignant of such moments occurs when Éléonore Pimentalé, a famous artist, accompanies friends d'Hauteville and Camille (or Fragoletta) to the Museum of Naples, where they encounter Polycles's statue of a recumbent hermaphrodite.⁵⁶ D'Hauteville plays the French military man and brooding romantic hero who gradually falls in love with the androgynous Camille. The latter, at this point, is locked in a loveless and apparently unconsummated marriage with a much older man. She appears flattered by d'Hauteville's advances, but her impressions of him will shift radically once they behold the hermaphrodite sculpture.

In historical fact, Napoleon had purchased the statue from his brother-in-law, the prince Camille Borghèse in 1807, and had it installed in the Louvre, so the work would have been available for Latouche's immediate

scrutiny as he penned *Fragoletta*.⁵⁷ It is even possible that the recently acquired statue and its Italian origins might have partially inspired Latouche to write his novel about a hermaphrodite and Italian history. In addition to composing “Contralto” in homage to the Louvre hermaphrodite, Gautier was also fascinated by the sculpture, frequently visiting the museum to contemplate it.⁵⁸ Allegedly, the sculpture elicited such popular fascination that it had to be protected from “visitors’ caresses” with a barrier, because they were actually beginning to wear down the stone.⁵⁹

Once again, Cuisin steals Latouche’s thunder by discussing the same statue in *Clémentine* almost a decade earlier. Clémentine and her adoptive sister, Nathalia, read about the sculpture and their discovery prompts a lively discussion about hermaphroditism that signifies differently for each, just as the sculpture will trigger multiple levels of interpretation in Latouche’s novel. When Nathalia jokes about hermaphrodites as “monsters,” Clémentine is quick to defend herself and those like her: “I limited myself to answering that since our physical appearance is independent from our desires, it would be cruel to mock victims of destiny’s bizarreries” (1: 81). Here again, Cuisin infuses his fiction with contemporary scientific discourse. The characterization of hermaphroditism as a “deviation” or “trick” of nature is a hallmark of science predating Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire’s theory of arrested or excess development. Nathalia promises instead that if she were a hermaphrodite, “I would fool a thousand pretty girls, and I would make even more male lovers languish” (1: 80, 81). This other sensational plotline is never fully borne out in works on hermaphroditism, although, as previously demonstrated, it cuts to the underlying anxiety in the medical record.⁶⁰

While Cuisin’s mention of the statue proves merely anecdotal, Latouche transforms his reference to the famous sculpture into a central plot element. In this scene, Camille, d’Hauteville, and the artist Éléonore approach the statue from behind. D’Hauteville is struck by its graceful feminine beauty – at once mysterious and revealing:

Leaning on a graceful arm, it looks like it was half asleep. The head, turned in the opposite direction to the body’s pose, seems to express at once a smile and sadness. One of the crossed legs lifts a charming foot, and the other is gracefully entwined in the folds of a cloak, which nevertheless leaves almost all of this beauty without veil. (1: 87)

But the statue reserves a shock for d’Hauteville: as he rounds to the front, he lets out an “exclamation of surprise,” instinctively turning his head “in order to hide a smile” (1: 88). Camille, on the other hand, follows him,

without comprehension: “naively [ingénument], she stopped alongside him, considered the marble for a moment, and then the Frenchman, as if to question him about his surprise” (1: 88). Initially, two possible interpretations present themselves for Camille’s apparent incomprehension as she contemplates d’Hauteville’s wonderment: either she does not know what an erect member is (and therefore is not surprised by it), or she does not think it is out of place on this marble-bosomed body (1: 88, 89). In a moment we shall see why only the latter of the two possibilities is supported by the text. Whatever the case, however, by watching d’Hauteville, Camille instantly internalizes that this combination is comical, lacks verisimilitude, and, in his eyes, constitutes an unworthy subject of art.⁶¹

It is to Latouche’s credit that this crucial moment of revelation can be read on multiple levels. On the surface, the historical and artistic stakes of intersex are debated from two opposing worldviews. On a deeper level, however, the scene functions in parallel with the dictionary episode for Clémentine by teaching Camille – mediated through d’Hauteville’s reactions – about the transgressive nature of her own body.⁶² Initially, Éléonore and d’Hauteville debate the merits of “hermaphroditism” as a subject of art. Éléonore, ever the artist, champions the purity of aesthetic expression in all forms, and lambasts d’Hauteville as “one of these men of the north whose imagination is offended by everything, whose appreciation of beauty is preoccupied by a thousand hesitations, or rather whose entire taste consists of endless fears of admiring” (1: 88). Conversely, d’Hauteville, a military man of action, questions the artistic merit of certain corporeal subjects. For him, the “capricious composition” seems “unworthy of art” and he wonders, “why give a body to such a fanciful daydream [fabuleuse rêverie]?” (1: 89). This remark sparks a shift in their conversation to the historical existence of “hermaphrodites,” and it becomes immediately apparent that d’Hauteville has conducted a fair bit of research on the subject, despite his prudish airs. He explains to Éléonore that he has read historians “who record that these monsters that your love of the marvelous would have us admire were once thrown into the sea in Athens and the Tiber in Rome” (1: 90). Contemporary reference books evoke similar tales.⁶³ The narrator further hints at d’Hauteville’s bad faith by describing the contradiction between his actions and his discourse. When Éléonore reminds d’Hauteville that such individuals might exist in nature even today, he confesses, having overcome his initial giggles and now unable to wrench his eyes from the statue, that he has read corroborative legal and medical testimony:

In truth, I believe I remember, continued d'Hauteville slowly, but with his eyes still fixed on the statue, I believe I remember that modern science has sometimes mixed its attestations with your belief. Serious doctors and lawyers have, in faith, intervened on behalf of similar phenomena, but I have always supposed, and I will always believe, that they were taking advantage of our gullibility. (1: 89–90)

D'Hauteville's stubborn refusal to admit the existence of intersex despite the certification of "serious" doctors, lawyers, and historians serves as one metaphor for reading the novel. True to his word, the military man will fumble through the next several hundred pages without ever discovering why Camille refuses his perpetual advances, never really listening for the meaning behind each protestation. D'Hauteville's interpretation is not necessarily wrong; at no point will Latouche clearly disprove him. It is, in fact, possible to read the entire novel à la d'Hauteville, as several critics have, imagining that Camille is no more than a "psychological hermaphrodite" who later lives as a man in order to discover the world differently, much like Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. But the narrator's hints also invite a more attentive reading that is important, not because of the scandal it unleashes, but because it will go a long way toward explaining the fascination with androgyny in works by Balzac, Gautier, and beyond.

In order to understand the subtext of the museum scene, we must again turn to the narrator for clues. Thoroughly engaged by his debate with Éléonore and still transfixed by the statue, d'Hauteville fails to notice that Camille has been backing away from him as he speaks: "Camille distanced herself by several steps, likely because of a natural instinct of prudishness [sans doute par un naturel instinct de pudeur], and Éléonore, more liberated, continued" (1: 90). The secret scandal of the museum scene is that Latouche describes Camille's anatomy with the kind of detail which no novel could permit. Meaning is communicated through the reactions of others, and all the implied references to Camille's person are mediated through a piece of stone. The inattentive reader might think that a naive Camille is not surprised by the sculpture's member because she is in complete ignorance of all human anatomy. The same reader might take the narrator at his word that d'Hauteville is a prude and that Camille backs away from him as if in fear of the ancient "monsters" he invokes. But the attentive reader will notice that Camille is horrified in this scene because she identifies with the statue, and because she learns that the man who has been professing his love to her ad nauseam would abhor her should she reveal her true identity. She is not "liberated" in the way Éléonore is to discuss the theoretical merits her body offers to art, because she is tied to

this body that she now learns is a curse. Nor can she dismiss scientific authority or historical narrative with the kind of half-conscious distraction (or perhaps sexual stimulation) as d'Hauteville, because the bodies she imagines coming under scrutiny and hurled off cliffs are bodies similar to her own, similar to the one she sees before her.

Later events support this interpretation. We learn that Camille, in particular, rushed to leave the museum, that she insisted on returning home that very night despite several reasons not to, and that "her mind seemed to have fallen into some painful preoccupation, and one would have said that she was seeking to pull herself away from a thought that was obsessing her" (1: 96, 93–94). Just like Clémentine, hidden behind the bookcase, from the moment that Camille overhears d'Hauteville's thoughts about hermaphroditism, she knows any relationship with him will prove impossible; indeed, that all love is forbidden to her. This will become a leitmotiv in every other nineteenth-century novel about intersex and even in several novels with androgynous main characters. (D'Albert, as we shall see, constantly laments his forbidden and "monstrous" attraction to Théodore de Sérannes, who turns out to be Mademoiselle de Maupin in drag.) Leading up to the museum scene, Camille had seemed interested in d'Hauteville, with her only reluctance apparently stemming from the fact that she was married at the time. Camille's elderly husband, however, has never been her lover or even the jealous type. Instead, he serves as a purely paternal figure, and he will handpick d'Hauteville as his successor before dying. In d'Hauteville's mind, therefore, the temporary obstacle blocking his happiness is Camille's marriage, but Camille has just learned the existence of a more permanent kind of barrier.

Camille becomes so despondent after the sculpture scene that even d'Hauteville eventually notices something is wrong. Yet, despite Camille's veiled confessions, the Frenchman stubbornly refuses to listen. Camille hints that, like the sculpture, she is a "sculptor's daughter" (1: 100). Lamenting her mother's death, she adds, to the chagrin of her interlocutor, that "from today onward I am sure that my mother is the only person who could have ever loved me on this earth" (1: 102). D'Hauteville, as usual, fails to notice the significance of Camille's use of the word "today," or to consider the lessons which might set it apart from all others. Instead, he sentimentally offers to give his life "a thousand times over" to the being whom he had unknowingly called a "monster" only a moment earlier (1: 102). While d'Hauteville drones on with romantic platitudes about the "serenity" and "sweetness" of the night, Camille is deep in thought. Suddenly, s/he announces for the first time that s/he has a long-lost brother, Philippe Adriani, whose identity s/he

will assume in the remainder of the novel.⁶⁴ After the museum scene, Camille's own body, as Clémentine's had initially seemed to be, becomes the obstacle to his/her happiness. From this point onward, Camille will constantly repeat – both as a woman and a man – that the future holds no promise of happiness (1: 103).

Latouche redoubles clues that Camille is intersex without ever stating it explicitly. On the return ferry from the museum, Camille notices that the ship is flooding, and with the true martyrdom of romantic heroes, both Camille and d'Hauteville clamor to sacrifice themselves to save the other, believing that a lighter load might avoid sinking. At first glance, this scene reads like confirmation of Latouche's inability to coherently organize his novel.⁶⁵ But, in fact, it provides another clue to Camille's identity. Only pages earlier, d'Hauteville had described how historical intersex people were once flung off cliffs to drown, so Camille's sudden desire to perish in the waves can be read as a confession of bodily difference. Lest we overlook this clue, Latouche alerts us to the parallel by using the word "monster." (It is worth recalling that the origin of the word "monster" is related to the Latin "monere," meaning "to warn."⁶⁶) Racked by the guilt of having incited the suicide of his former lover, d'Hauteville declares himself a "monster" who deserves death (1: 107). Camille, once again, announces that she is the monstrous one, tellingly without using the painful word itself: "No! It is not you, it is not you, repeated Camille . . . and it is not for you to die" (1: 107). The immediate juxtaposition of these two sentences makes apparent that Camille believes s/he is the "monster" and that, rather than d'Hauteville, it is his/her place to die. Unsurprisingly, d'Hauteville remains too preoccupied with his heroic posturing to listen.

In a letter addressed to d'Hauteville, Camille later admits to having read up on hermaphroditism (like the fictional Clémentine and historical Marie B.), and that studies confirm s/he is doomed:

I have reflected on my fate; I have been enlightened by meditations and readings; I have nothing to hope for or to fear. I am therefore going away from a country given over to the anger of unjust men. God himself is unjust because the existence that he gave me would bring misfortune to whoever might place hope in a bond with me. (1: 164)

D'Hauteville is crestfallen. By this time, Camille's elderly husband had died, and d'Hauteville hoped that any impediment to his love would disappear with the old man. Instead, Camille's persistent hints leave d'Hauteville only with a growing awareness of some impenetrable mystery: "therein lies some horrible secret that must be discovered" (1: 164). This secret – which is in some

ways an open secret – and d’Hauteville’s mission to uncover it become the motor driving the plot forward. As we have seen, Barthes called this enigma propelling the narrative the “hermeneutic code,” and often it remains incompletely resolved at the denouement.⁶⁷ Our goal as reader is the same as d’Hauteville’s, but just as he never really “gets it,” neither does Latouche fully unveil the mystery to the reader. If we were waiting for Latouche to spell out the riddle, to confirm that Philippe was really Camille all along, that s/he is intersex just like the sculpture, we will be frustrated.

Dangerous Interpretations

Understanding the statue scene will become the key to deciphering the trauma of a later scene that literary critics have remained unwilling to interpret in its shocking totality. This is the scene in which Philippe Adriani, having been banished for attempting to seduce d’Hauteville’s younger sister Eugénie, is really lurking behind the bushes of d’Hauteville’s family home and watching from the shadows, like Madame de Lafayette’s lovesick Nemours. Philippe, the long-lost “brother” Camille suddenly claimed to have immediately following the museum visit, appeared at d’Hauteville’s family estate in France just as Camille disappeared from d’Hauteville’s life in Italy. Back in the garden, Philippe now suddenly springs from the foliage and begins spouting amorous prose calculated to overwhelm Eugénie. The scene’s every detail contributes to the overall conclusion that Philippe intends to harm her. Initially, Philippe is compared to the “demon of the celestial garden,” and then the “perfidious and terrible child” lures her into a secluded section of the garden to rape her (2: 180–81). Not only does Philippe commit violence on Eugénie’s person, but the rapist also masterfully manipulates her, so that in the end, Eugénie will believe that what happened was her own fault. In a reference to the hermaphrodite sculpture, Philippe’s lust is compared to some kind of Greek wonder: “This love resembled only the emotions that the Greeks knew, a drunkenness of feelings foreign to the soul, a desire more excessive than ideal. But their emotions also allegedly created miracles, gave sex to a cloud, and life and love to Pygmalion’s marble” (2: 184). The fierce desire awakened in Philippe’s breast is excessive and immoderate, powerful enough to animate stone or vapor.

The rape scene is triggering and difficult to read. Eugénie pleads for Philippe to stop, and s/he almost does: “Adriani hesitated nevertheless: for a moment he wanted to respect his still pure victim; the imploring whining of the poor and tender girl would have rattled a human soul” (2: 185). As s/he pins her to the ground though, Philippe imagines that Eugénie’s arms

pull him/her close, which s/he willfully interprets as consent: "But either by an involuntary movement of tenderness, or a convulsion of terror, he believed he felt one of Eugénie's arms holding him and squeezing him. Then . . . all of his blood spilled and the threat of eternal punishment would have been too little to separate him from his idol. He remained" (2: 185). When Eugénie's mother awakens at two in the morning, she searches frantically for her missing daughter, only to find her unconscious, soaked from the downpour, resting on the folds of her dress (2: 187). Having been violated, Eugénie's own body now becomes a transgression and is transformed into a statue. Eugénie is compared to "one of those white statues that rest upon a cenotaph," which both prefigures her imminent death and gestures to the one who has caused it (2: 187).

Despite the fact that Latouche leaves out the actual rape, employing instead ellipses and the euphemism "he remained" to silence the act, no room for doubt remains in the other characters' minds. Eugénie's mother knows for certain when she undresses her daughter: "she undressed poor Eugénie slowly; and, suddenly, forgetting her carefulness, her tenderness perhaps, she took a few steps back in order to ask her questions without pity" (2: 187).⁶⁸ Even Philippe Adriani, who has made several allusions to his/her innocence, seems to tacitly admit guilt in the final duel scene of the novel. Moments before d'Hauteville runs Philippe through, s/he pleads: "Who knows if Eugénie and I are not innocent?" (2: 330). "Coward! You do not want to die and you are pleading," reasons d'Hauteville. Philippe confesses guilt by refusing to deny d'Hauteville's accusation: "And even so – cannot missing life be permitted to me? I am still so young" (2: 330).⁶⁹

The rape scene is rarely mentioned by the few critics who have discussed *Fragoletta*.⁷⁰ Frédéric Ségu only refers to the scene in passing, insisting that nothing happened: "Surprised by her mother, she faints, and, over the course of the serious illness that results from this emotion, Eugénie, chaste soul who believes herself sullied, recounts her mistake to her brother while exaggerating it."⁷¹ Yet, Eugénie does not limply fall to the ground when surprised by her mother. Her mother finds her in the middle of the night, already unconscious; her immobile, rain-covered body compared to a marble statue. Nevertheless, Ségu is not alone in his belief that Eugénie just "imagines" being violated. Even though M. Paul Pelckmans acknowledges the incontrovertible violence of this scene, he cannot admit a rape took place, since for him, rape can only be perpetrated on a woman by a man, and he is sure that Camille is no more than a woman in disguise: "Eugénie believed herself to be dishonored but it is impossible that Adriani-Fragoletta actually had sex with her [l'ait vraiment possédée]."⁷²

The fact that readers seem unwilling to acknowledge the full horror of this scene may partially be owing to the longstanding critical belief that “romantic androgynes” were idealized figures and that the damned “decadent hermaphrodite” did not make its debut until the fin de siècle. If Philippe Adriani were the creation of Rachilde or Huysmans, one might have less trouble interpreting the rape scene. But because Ségu, like Nigel Smith, endeavors to show the foundational influence of *Fragoletta* on Balzac’s *Séraphîta* and Gautier’s *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, in which the androgynous characters are supposed to be idealized, they seem unwilling to confront the darker side of Latouche’s character. However, this argument underestimates the importance of Balzac’s more unsettling use of androgyny in *Sarrasine* and *La fille aux yeux d’or*. The latter, which he wrote at the same time as *Séraphîta*, makes the link *Fragoletta* establishes between desire and violence explicit with Paquita’s murder, and the androgynous brother-sister team echoes the sexual domination present in Latouche’s rape scene. As I will show, even in Gautier and Balzac’s more idealized works, bodily desire remains latently present.

Ségu’s perfunctory dismissal of anything untoward occurring in this scene also has to do with the way Latouche has chosen to recount it. Just as with the statue, Latouche displaces “certainty” from the bodies in question. “Truth” is not fully articulated, and just when it seems most clear, new evidence will emerge to further obfuscate it. If frustrating for the reader, this strategy pays dividends when it comes to confounding censorship, and it echoes the central mystery of the novel surrounding Camille/Philippe’s sex and sexuality, so that ultimately the lack of resolution is consistent with the plot. In this way, *Fragoletta* is diametrically opposed to its predecessor *Clémentine*, for while Clémentine and the reader both learn that she is intersex simultaneously, Latouche stops short of fully revealing Camille/Philippe. And there is something deeply disquieting about the finale of *Fragoletta*, partially because contemporary readers have learned to expect “true sex” to dawn, and partially because, though we are left with no certainty, we feel that Latouche ends with a lie.

In the final duel, Philippe reiterates Camille’s proclamations about being a monster and deserving death: “Who told you that I had a conscience, a heart, and humanity? What do I have in common with human creatures? I am not of their species” (2: 326, 328–29). After d’Hauteville runs his sister’s attacker through with a sword, “Philippe” tries unsuccessfully to cast himself/herself into the sea (a second echo of the ancient tales) in the hope of disguising “the truth” of his/her body forever.

Nevertheless, Philippe/Camille's body is recovered and brought to a neighboring monastery, where "the oldest of the priests trained to practice medicine" begins an autopsy by opening Philippe's blouse (2: 340). The novel's last enigmatic line reads: "My brothers [...] we must bring the body to the Sisters of Mercy" (2: 341). At first reading, this is one of the more perplexing conclusions French literature has to offer. Could Camille really only ever have been a woman who disguised as a man in order to avoid d'Hauteville for some undisclosed reason? Such a conclusion cannot account for the way Camille suddenly refuses d'Hauteville's attentions after the museum trip. Even though Latouche's entire novel fundamentally resists certainty, resonances send us back to the sculpture scene for a second interpretation.

In the final pages, the priest abandons his autopsy table the moment he discovers Philippe/Camille's breasts. These breasts represent a fleshy parallel to the sculpture, and like the stone member that scandalized d'Hauteville, they are startling because of their context. The male genitals were shocking on what d'Hauteville believed to be a female body, just as the breasts are shocking because they were discovered on what was thought to be a male corpse, by a man who is, moreover, forbidden to see them. However, the scene is also a lie since the post-mortem was never completed. Upon finding breasts, the befuddled religious doctor retreats: "he was shaking. He nevertheless quickly put down a first instrument before going away, and he did so with his eyes down, his forehead red, and his countenance troubled" (2: 340). The priest's shock recalls d'Hauteville's initial embarrassment before the sculpture. His is another metaphor for reading, but one that stops short of examining the whole text. Both reactions tell cautionary tales about readerly response that provide insight into why Latouche chose to tread so lightly in his bodily descriptions of Fragoletta (and why Balzac was so reluctant to summarize the novel). Although we assume Camille/Philippe's trousers reserve the same surprise as the sculpture, we cannot know because Latouche does not disclose this information. Perhaps he feared that redoing the scene once the body reached the convent would tip the balance of his novel toward farce; that his prudish reader, like d'Hauteville before the sculpture, might turn away.

At the same time, however, to overly insist on a reading of Camille/Philippe as intersex would be tantamount to missing the point. At some level, the reader's desire to see the full "truth" revealed commits the same essentialist assumption as the fearful priest: it suggests that sex is everywhere inscribed on the body. It is only a matter of knowing where to look and how to tally up the parts. The beauty of Latouche's denouement is that

he exposes that belief as mere cultural myth. By refusing to fully undress Camille/Philippe, Latouche effectively deconstructs any essential notion of sex by dissociating it from the presence of a given body part. Instead, we learn that peering underneath clothing does not necessarily reveal any truth at all. It tells us only about ourselves, perhaps about our own voyeurism, or what we allow ourselves to see, like the priest, who discovers only a mirror for his own shame. By refusing to reveal the “truth” of bodies, *Fragoletta* introduces the possibility that there is no “true sex,” or, at least, that medicine, like the inobservant doctor, can only clumsily decipher it. As we saw in Part I, contemporary medical literature on historical intersex related similar difficulties and sexing errors.

At the same time that Latouche’s priest/doctor was botching his autopsy, contemporary medical men and forensics experts were faced with incontrovertible difficulties when attempting to reconcile cases of intersex with a system of binary gender. Time and again, we saw famous doctors disagree about which sex (if any) to ascribe to their patients, and on what characteristics such determinations should be based. No one method could escape the danger of later reversal, and the rapid pace of evolving scientific technology seemed only to further obfuscate the issue, as biopsies began to reveal that individuals who appeared outwardly to harmonize perfectly with the female sex might, in fact, harbor internal organs of the “male sex.”

Even more surprising then, is an article from the *Gazette des tribunaux* of August 23, 1833, in which the journalist instructs readers to consult *Fragoletta* in order to glean the truth for a legal proceeding. Crafting a euphemistic and elided style to pique the reader’s curiosity, the author offers a mysterious rendition of a recently ended marriage between a woman and her intersex husband:

The Civil Tribunal will soon try a case of which there are few examples in judiciary annals. Several years ago, Mademoiselle D. . . married Sir L. . . She was young, naive, and imagining nothing in a husband except a cashmere and the name *Madame*, she did not understand right away what position she was in, and did not realize that something could be missing. Nevertheless, she was soon enlightened by her confidences with a few young female friends and by her mother’s instructions. Indeed, her *husband* had a sweet and feminine face, the rounded forms that did not seem to belong to his sex, etc. In short, a thousand other unmistakable remarks came to convince the young lady (or demoiselle) that her spouse could have just as easily been the wife of another as he was her husband. Monsieur L. . . was . . . read the last chapter of *Fragoletta*. (1047)

Readers will no doubt relish the inversion of a newspaperman sending us to a novel in order to glean the facts about a historical case. According to the *Gazette* author, the last chapter of *Fragoletta* will elucidate this mystery, but, as we have seen, the novel itself does not reveal the promised truth. Despite Latouche's ambiguity and the traditional scholarly unwillingness to identify Fragoletta as intersex, it is clear from this article that some readers had no trouble deciphering the scandalous enigma of the novel. However, the journalist's reading of *Fragoletta* interprets the androgyne as an individual equally endowed to become "wife" or "husband," whereas the entire drama of the novel stems from the impossibility for the intersex character to fit into those social roles. Indeed, it is this crisis which most likens Fragoletta's plight to the legal case evoked by the *Gazette des tribunaux* writer. Balzac understood this tension. In his review of Latouche's novel, he described Fragoletta as an "an inexpressible being, who does not have a complete sex, and in the heart of whom battled a woman's timidity and a man's energy, who loves the sister, is loved by the brother, and can give nothing to either one."⁷³ While insisting on Fragoletta's position outside of binary gender, Balzac glosses over bodily sexuality in favor of more platonic sentiments, a choice prefiguring his own *Séraphîta*.

That Cuisin's Clémentine embodies the best of both man and woman fits with the consensus among literary critics that earlier representations of hermaphroditism are often idealized. (We have seen that *Fragoletta* problematizes this distinction.) Both *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and *Séraphîta* portray androgyny as the combined superlative of both sexes rather than a compromised amalgam falling somewhere in between. Several later decadent works like *Les demi-sexes* by the popular author Jane de La Vaudère, or *Monsieur Vénus* by the more famous Rachilde, describe their androgynous protagonists as less than perfect exemplars of both sexes. In *Monsieur Vénus*, Raoule de Vénérande is a masculinized woman who transitions away from femininity. Similarly, her partner, Jacques Silvert, is an effeminate man progressively emasculated by Raoule until he can no longer perform the "active" role during sex, a defining characteristic of masculinity.⁷⁴ In these works, androgynous characters become neither rather than both, and the calculus by which Raoule and Jacques "switch sexes" implies that masculine and feminine lie on opposite ends of the spectrum. To approach one is, by definition, to move away from the other.

However, as we have seen, Latouche's *Fragoletta* disrupts this neat temporal separation between the "romantic androgyne" and the "decadent hermaphrodite" in ways which critics have not always been willing to acknowledge. Despite *Fragoletta's* early publication date, Philippe Adriani's inferior ability as a swordsman along with his cowardice and cruelty hardly qualify him as an

exemplary male by nineteenth-century standards. Similarly, Philippe's alter ego, Camille, is too poorly developed for the reader to know if she embodies the "feminine" sensibilities of Mademoiselle de Maupin. As Balzac observed, Fragoletta is neither fully female nor fully male. S/he appears in the 1830s already tinged with the sexual cruelty of the decadent Raoule. As we shall see, Latouche's influence on Balzac is legible in Balzac's own ambivalent depictions of androgyny in *Séraphîta*. Given that Balzac credits Latouche as a source of inspiration, it is even conceivable that Latouche's vexed portrayal of hermaphroditism as both beauty and violence goes a long way toward explaining Balzac's own ambivalent use of androgyny throughout his career. And this richness in Balzac's characters, in turn, helps to explain the lasting influence of androgyny throughout the century, and why later authors like Zola, who are thought only to portray "evil," decadent "hermaphrodites," continue to allude to Balzac and Latouche.

The Pure and the Impure in *Séraphîta*

Readings of *Séraphîta* have been conditioned by the belief that Balzac's use of androgyny stems from Swedenborgian mysticism, but our review of earlier works on intersex invites us to see Balzac's novel in a new light.⁷⁵ In a letter to Madame Hanska, Balzac reveals that a sculpture of a hermaphrodite initially inspired him to write *Séraphîta*.⁷⁶ In the same letter, he also admits his debt to Latouche's *Fragoletta*: "Séraphîta will be both natures in a single being, like Fragoletta, but with this difference that I imagine this creature as an angel arrived at its last transformation, and breaking its envelope in order to arrive at the heavens" (88). Because of Balzac's description of an angel and his avowed adherence to Swedenborgian mysticism, most critics have read *Séraphîta* as a being entirely divorced from material and historical context.⁷⁷ Yet since Balzac alludes to *Fragoletta* (1829) as a point of departure for his novel, and since it is not revealed that Séraphîta/Séraphitüs is an angel virtually until her/his ascension to heaven, it is also imperative to examine Balzac's use of androgyny in the context of Latouche's story about a physiological hermaphrodite (as was the case when Balzac began writing it in 1833).⁷⁸ Reading *Séraphîta* in this way reveals the novel to be fraught with previously overlooked tensions between material and spiritual epistemologies and desires, and is important because it uncovers a radical subversion of gender norms where we would least expect to find one.

Even though Balzac claims that *Séraphîta* perfectly reflects Swedenborg's teachings, scholars have been quick to point out that the author's knowledge

of the mystic actually originates from Daillant de La Touche's abridged rendition of Swedenborg's works.⁷⁹ Analysis of Balzac's early drafts of the novel reveals that his insistence on the androgyny of *Séraphîta/Séraphitüs* was added later, in revisions that excised material references that could have ascribed a gender to the angel (II: 721). Yet this sexual indeterminism, which displaces "true sex" from the veiled sexual organs to what contemporary doctors called "secondary sexual characteristics," does not succeed in removing *Séraphîta/Séraphitüs* as a target of the sexual advances of other characters.⁸⁰ According to Henri Gauthier, both female and male characteristics are idealized and symbolize the purity and superiority of the angel (II: 722). But this reading overlooks the bodily yearnings which *Séraphîta/Séraphitüs* experiences, much to her/his chagrin. In other words, Balzac will preserve not only the gender indeterminism of *Fragoletta* with his character *Séraphîta/Séraphitüs*, but also the material yearnings his androgyne awakens in others and experiences firsthand.

Although the novel is titled *Séraphîta*, the reader's initial glimpse of the androgyne is of *Séraphitüs*, as *he* nimbly scales snow-covered peaks with Minna, "a pale young girl."⁸¹ The narrator attempts to describe *Séraphitüs* ambiguously as "the person Minna called *Séraphitüs*," "the being" (*l'être*), or "the singular being" (*l'être singulier*), but he also occasionally resorts to the masculine pronoun "he" (*il*), and it is clear from Minna's early declarations of love that she believes he is a man (II: 736, 738). The unintentional humor of this scene is that while *Séraphitüs* persistently spouts lofty aspirations of coming nearer to God, Minna professes her worldly love for him. With aplomb flying in the face of propriety, Minna endeavors to make her feelings known, undaunted by her would-be lover's reluctance. *Séraphitüs*, on the other hand, generally feigns incomprehension or else deflects Minna's attentions by recommending that she lavish her affections on Wilfred – a boy who, we will soon discover, is also in love with *Séraphîta*, but who regards the epicene character conversely, as the epitome of femininity.

Nevertheless, *Séraphitüs*'s religious fervor is, at some level, tainted with worldly materialism, and it is clear *s/he* is not entirely deaf to Minna's declarations: "I don't know if it is the moment to speak in such a way, but I want so much to share with you the flame of my hopes! Perhaps we will be together one day, in a world in which love does not die" (II: 743). *Séraphitüs*'s amorous diction strikes a discordant note in an idealized description of heaven. Minna's impatient quip, "Why not now and forever?" renders this sexual tension explicit (II: 743). Staring morosely at a rare flower, *Séraphitüs* also appears to regret sacrificing his material purpose for a spiritual one: "*Séraphitüs* contemplated with melancholy,

as if its smell expressed to him plaintive ideas that he alone understood” (II: 739). Séraphitüs later blushes when Minna unintentionally asks him about his own sexual potency while referencing the flower: “Why would it [the flower] be unique? It will no longer reproduce? Said the young girl to Séraphitüs” (II: 737). Like the lonely, hybrid flower, Séraphitüs is not destined to procreate.⁸²

Given Minna’s barrage of flirtation in the mountain scene and evident hope that Séraphitüs will marry her, their reception into civilization will prove astonishing. Upon their return, Minna’s father suddenly addresses Séraphitüs as a young woman: “Thank you, mademoiselle, answered the old man while placing his glasses on the book. You both must be tired” (II: 742). The feminine plural form of the adjective “fatiguées,” confirms irrefutably that Pastor Becker believes he is addressing two women. Balzac attempts to mitigate the blow of this shock for his now disoriented reader by describing Séraphitüs/Séraphîta as incomparable and otherworldly, the embodiment of both male and female perfection. The narrator explains that “No known type could offer an image of this face that was majestically male for Minna, but who, in the eyes of a man, would have eclipsed the most beautiful heads attributed to Raphaël” (II: 742). Here reappears Latouche’s theme of heteronormative desire projected onto an androgynous body. While Minna looks on Séraphitüs’s “majestically male face,” men perceive Séraphîta as feminine grace incarnate. Yet, unlike Latouche, who never fully exposed his character as intersex, or even Gautier, who explains early on to readers that his protagonist is a woman in drag, Balzac describes his creation as a hermaphrodite of both mind and body. But because this hermaphrodite is revealed to be an angel, the social and cultural difficulties that this dual identity creates are eventually transcended, and in this way, intentionally smoothed over. Over the period of several chapters before this revelation, the seraph plays a familiar role in the unknown gender plot as an object of both masculine and feminine desire. Indeed, *Séraphîta* raises many of the questions Balzac had treated earlier in his 1830 novella *Sarrasine*, and while on earth, his androgyne experiences much of the anguish described by both fictional characters and historical figures – most notably that of Herculine Barbin, whose memoirs, as we have seen, offer the only autobiographical account of intersex in nineteenth-century France.

At least for the first three chapters, when Séraphîta becomes the target of first Minna and then Wilfrid’s affections, the reader is meant to suspend disbelief while acclimating to the very fluid gender identity of Balzac’s main character. In some ways, then, Balzac expects his reader to inhabit the

same “happy limbo” of sexual indeterminism that Foucault reads into Barbin’s memoirs in the period before legal sex revision, and that Judith Butler has so astutely critiqued. According to Butler, Foucault “fails to recognize the concrete relations of power that both construct and condemn Herculine’s sexuality. Indeed, he appears to romanticize h/er world of pleasures [. . .], a world that exceeds the categories of sex and of identity.”⁸³ A second problem with Foucault’s “cursory reading,” as Butler sees it, is that it contradicts his argument in the *History of Sexuality*, in which Foucault suggests that sexuality cannot exist outside of the matrices of power. “Foucault invokes a trope of prediscursive libidinal multiplicity that effectively presupposes a sexuality ‘before the law’” (131). Similarly, Balzac wants to romanticize androgyny that exists not “before the law,” as Butler writes of Foucault, but rather “outside of worldly law,” which proves just as problematic because he situates his androgynous character within the worldly matrices of power by constructing indeterminism using the discursive realm of the novel.

The novel’s very structure mirrors the sexual ambiguity of the main character, alternating between descriptions of the “male” and “female” gender identities, if not of Séraphîta/Séraphitüs, then at least of those projected onto her/him by other characters.⁸⁴ Chapter two, titled “Séraphîta,” opens with Wilfred’s amorous declarations to the same character whom Minna sees as a perfect man, but whom Wilfrid suddenly addresses as “my beloved woman” (*ma bien-aimée*) (II: 748). With the womanizing Wilfred, Séraphîta becomes flirtatious and cruel: “Have I not spoken these words just as the Parisian ladies about whom you tell me the love stories? [. . .] You desire me and you do not love me. Tell me, do I not remind you of some flirtatious woman?” (II: 749, 751). Séraphîta recognizes that this corruption comes from contact with this world: “I am always wrong to set foot upon your earth” (II: 751). It should also be added that Séraphîta/Séraphitüs’s disparate personalities, which shift depending on whether the androgyne is acting the role of a man or a woman, echo (although with inversed genders) Latouche’s bipolar creation of the cruel Adriani and timid Camille in *Fragoletta*. Moreover, as Wilfred admires Séraphîta’s sensual form, he subtly acknowledges that her body harbors a mystery, much like that of Latouche’s androgynous protagonist, and one that somewhat recalls the Louvre hermaphrodite sculpture: “He slowly came closer in order to better behold the seductive creature that was lying stretched out before him, softly reclined, head resting in hand and with the elbow in a deceptive pose” (II: 751). This charge of “deception” is frequently leveled against historical intersex people in medical literature.⁸⁵

Séraphîta responds to Wilfred's projected desire in kind. Although she has begged Wilfred to marry Minna (as she asked Minna to look on Wilfred in the opening mountain scene), Séraphîta now admits that she would feel jealous of this union: "Well, Wilfred, listen, come close to me, yes, I would be angered to see you marry Minna; but when you will no longer see me, then . . . promise me to unite yourselves, heaven destined you for each other" (II: 753).

Like Clémentine and Fragoletta, Séraphîtus repeats that he is not fated for love: "I am like an outcast, exiled from heaven, and like a monster, with no place on earth" (II: 746). Recall that Camille had evoked almost the same terms when rejecting d'Hauteville. Similarly, in Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, published the following year, Théodore de Sérannes (Mademoiselle de Maupin in disguise) cites a mysteriously impossible love when refusing Rosette's advances: "It is not that I do not love Madame Rosette at all, I love her infinitely, but I have reasons to not marry that you yourself would find convincing, if it were possible for me to tell you."⁸⁶ As in *Séraphîta*, the unstated motivations in Gautier's novel are also the mystery propelling the plot forward, or the "hermeneutic code," to use Barthes's terminology. Even if the doubtful sex novels mentioned (*Fragoletta*, *Séraphîta* and *Sarrasine*, and *Mademoiselle de Maupin*), do not fully resolve the mystery at the denouement, they invariably lay bare the limitations of binary sex.

Several critics have outlined the ways in which Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* anticipates Butler's notion of "gender performativity," but not, to my knowledge, Balzac's *Séraphîta*, even though the two novels (published within a year of each other) both deal with sexual indeterminism and both draw their inspiration from Latouche's *Fragoletta*.⁸⁷ Likely because of the overarching importance of the "myth of the androgyne" in literary studies, coupled with Balzac's efforts to dissociate his androgynous protagonist from corporeal sex, critics have for too long overlooked the ways in which *Séraphîta* engages with the historical debate surrounding "hermaphroditism."⁸⁸ In a sense, this engagement should come as no surprise, owing to the large number of gender nonconforming or androgynous characters in Balzac's realist writings, and his other mysterious gender novel published four years earlier, *Sarrasine* – a story in which homosexual desire constitutes an infraction against the heterosexual matrix made punishable by death. *Séraphîta* is, in fact, more like *Sarrasine* and Balzac's realist corpus than has been previously acknowledged. This realization is crucial in order to understand his radical subversion of gender paradigms in *Séraphîta*.

Butler famously defined gender as “a stylized repetition of acts” (191), meaning that it is “a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them” (190). It is clear from the scenes analyzed previously that gender is performative in Balzac’s *Séraphîta*: both Minna and Wilfrid perceive the gendered object of their desire based on a stylized repetition of acts and those secondary sexual characteristics that were, in nineteenth-century France, and that still, in part, continue to be associated with femininity or masculinity to this day as a result of cultural construct. Séraphîtus embodies boldness, athleticism, physical strength, and the ability to protect; whereas Séraphîta is seductiveness, beauty, and the desire to nurture incarnate. Furthermore, the narrator often renders explicit the link between gender and actions, as if to reinforce social norms. When Wilfrid greets Séraphîta as a woman in the opening sentences of the second chapter, the narrator interprets her gestures as indicators of femininity: “She turned slowly toward him, after having tossed her hair back as does a beautiful woman who, suffering from a migraine, no longer has the strength to complain” (II: 748).

Stereotypes about women with headaches aside, what is especially interesting about Balzac’s use of “gender performativity,” then, is that it depends almost less on the gendered performances of Balzac’s main character than on the projected desire of those that behold him/her and their belief in binary sex. In hearing her feminine name called out by Wilfrid, Séraphîta responds, the narrator reminds us with a simile, “as would a pretty woman” (ibid.). Later, when Wilfrid expresses wonderment at Séraphîta’s behavior as a “coquettish woman,” rather than “the pure and celestial young girl” he beheld for the first time in church, Séraphîta demonstrates her chameleon-like ability to perform a radically different identity: “Séraphîta passed her hands over her forehead, and when she revealed her face, Wilfred was surprised by the religious and holy expression that was spread over it” (751). One could interpret this scene as a confirmation of Séraphîta’s supernatural ability to radiate a pure, celestial identity. Alternatively, it could be read as evidence that Séraphîta’s “saint expression” was one performance among many.

While Minna persists in considering Séraphîtus as a man, remaining unperturbed when other characters address her companion as a woman, Wilfrid becomes increasingly exasperated by Minna’s consistent use of the masculine pronoun “he” (il), perhaps because it would imply homoerotic desire on his part. Irritated, he finally quips: “He? asked Wilfrid, who?” (II:

802). If “they” had been the word of the year in 1834, (and it was gender-neutral in French), Balzac might have written a very different novel. Wilfrid’s impatient jibe effectively shames Minna into silence, even though his outburst might well stem from the fear of homosexuality: “The young girl lowered her head while casting him a look full of sweet malice” (II: 803). Wilfrid’s frustration suggests that Balzac anticipated how difficult it would be for nineteenth-century readers to reconcile a nonbinary, supernatural being with the worldly heterosexual matrix.

To the extent that performative gender opens up the space necessary for action that destabilizes normative notions of gender and sexuality in Balzac’s novel, the instability of Séraphîta/Séraphitüs’s gender identity (and the tricky “limbo” Balzac asks the reader to inhabit in order to understand it) accomplishes the political work advocated in Butler’s theory. It is true that Séraphîta/Séraphitüs’s ascension in the final chapter will ultimately sublimate danger to worldly binaries and tidily resolve the “threat” of homosexual desire by replacing it with the heterosexual and normative union of formerly “transgressive” figures, Minna and Wilfrid. However, large sections of the novel expose the “tenuous construction” (to use Butler’s terminology) of gender norms even in nineteenth-century France (192). A mystical novel about an androgynous angel loved by both a man and a woman, who rises to heaven as pure light in the final chapter may seem a strange choice for the author of *The Human Comedy*; but Balzac’s representation of unstable gender identity both ties the novel thematically to his larger corpus, and renders the text more strangely subversive than we might have ever thought.

Mademoiselle de Maupin and Medicine

Mademoiselle de Maupin recounts a relatively banal love triangle with a few spicy innovations. The Chevalier d’Albert, a young, epicene dandy, searches listlessly for his ideal woman. D’Albert will eventually take a lover whom he calls “Rosette” – charmingly after one of his dogs – and although she is extraordinary in every way, she nevertheless falls short of his ideal of perfection. Rosette, the reader learns, is also using d’Albert to palliate an unrequited love for her old flame Théodore de Sérannes, who conveniently returns just when d’Albert and Rosette are beginning to become intolerably bored with one another. Much to d’Albert’s horror, Théodore, Rosette’s former love interest, embodies everything d’Albert had so ardently desired in a lover, and he spends the rest of the novel in anguish, hoping Théodore

might be a woman in disguise and despairing that he would love Théodore as a man just the same. Just as d'Albert bemoans his impossible desire for Théodore, the reader learns that Théodore had earlier refused Rosette's affections for some still unknown and apparently incontrovertible reason. Through Théodore's letters, we eventually discover it: Théodore is none other than Madeleine de Maupin, who has taken on a masculine identity. It is only in the final pages of the novel that Maupin reveals themselves to d'Albert by spending half a night of passion with him before retiring to Rosette's room for the second half.⁸⁹ Maupin disappears by dawn, leaving a final letter to explain that separation is the only way forward. The lovers would only inevitably tire of each other otherwise.

No doubt because the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* is almost more famous than the novel itself, Gautier's use of androgyny has most often been analyzed in relation to his philosophical aesthetics.⁹⁰ I would like to focus, however, on the ways in which the narrative engages with the historical debate surrounding unknown, or "doubtful" sex. The justification for what might otherwise seem like an eccentric comparison can be found in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*'s own project. In chapter 10, we finally learn that Maupin transformed themselves into Théodore de Sérannes in order to determine what men were really thinking, so that they might find one worthy of loving.⁹¹ Maupin explicitly defines this endeavor as medical in nature: "I wanted to study man in depth, to dissect him fiber by fiber with an inexorable scalpel and to hold him alive and palpating on my dissection table" (1: 385). Gautier's use of the scalpel here situates *Mademoiselle de Maupin* within the realm of what Lawrence Rothfield terms "medical realism," and what Foucault identified as part of the "clinical gaze."⁹² In addition to anchoring the plot to a new field of inquiry (medicine), this fascinating formulation determines the novel's focus as a study or *dissection* of human nature, while placing Maupin squarely in the role of the doctor/author.

In this way, Gautier's novel can be seen as more subversive than its predecessors, since the transgressive figure (Maupin) discursively takes up the tools of scientific inquiry in order to use them against men, and, by extension, heteronormative institutions of power.⁹³ Unlike Maupin, Clémentine was victimized by medical examination, and doctors generally appear in Cuisin's novel as cruel and opportunistic. Fragoletta's nervous priest hastily drew a faulty conclusion about the identity of Adriani's corpse owing to his essentialist equation of breasts with femininity. Similarly, in *Séraphita*, Pastor Becker spends his days perusing scientific literature in the hope of finding precedents which could account for the strange androgyny

and mysterious abilities of Balzac's main character. Of course, Becker's explorations are powerless to explain *Séraphîta/Séraphitüs*, since the identity as an angel lies outside the scope of scientific investigation.

In addition to the medical overtones of Maupin's project, the novel rehearses a preoccupation with scientific scrutiny in a vain attempt to determine the "true sex" of Théodore/Madeleine.⁹⁴ D'Albert describes studying their every contour, movement, and body part in a passage sharing a number of similarities with historical case histories of intersex:

If you only knew [...] how carefully and with what breathless anxiety I observed you, down to your slightest movements! Nothing escaped me; how I ardently looked at the finest revelation of skin that appeared on your neck and wrists in order to try to ascertain your sex! [...] I analyzed the undulations of your step, how you placed your feet, how you swept back your hair; I tried to discover your secret from the habits of your body. [...] Never has anyone been looked at more ardently than you. (I: 475–76)

Yet, for all his intense observation, d'Albert remains powerless to discover Maupin's gender and his analysis results merely in vacillating interpretations: "I said to myself: surely, she is a woman" – then suddenly a brusque and daring movement, a virile accent or gesture would destroy my flimsy edifice of probabilities in an instant and throw me back into my initial doubts" (I: 476). Maupin realizes that d'Albert is visually dissecting them: "he must recognize each one of the hairs on my head and know exactly how many eyelashes I have on my eyelids; my feet, my hands, my neck, my cheeks, the slightest hairs at the corner of my lips, he has examined everything, compared everything, analyzed everything" (I: 507). Unlike Maupin, who remains in control, d'Albert cannot muster any clinical certainty, doubting Maupin's sex virtually until they go to bed together (I: 511).

As was illustrated in Part I, this visual scrutiny in order to reveal the mystery of doubtful sex is shared by medical publications of the time. In case studies of "hermaphroditism" not just body parts, but also gestures, tonalities, and mannerisms all became objects of intense study. Even as the genre of the case history became increasingly codified, doctors often relied on the same narrative techniques found in contemporary literature, including the "descriptive imperative" identified by Brooks as a hallmark of the nineteenth-century novel, which is evident in d'Albert's visual dissection of Maupin above.⁹⁵ Because d'Albert's analysis centers on determining Maupin's gender through visual scrutiny, this passage shares more with case studies of hermaphroditism than the popular genre of physiognomy, which relies on observation in order to describe typology rather than to reveal hidden "true sex."

Foucault recognized this method of decipherment as a hallmark of the nineteenth century in particular, when doctors began “deciphering the true sex that was hidden beneath ambiguous appearances.”⁹⁶ Part I of this book demonstrated that the assertion of “true sex” was more a claim borne out through narrative case histories than an objective scientific reality, and that many doctors either did not believe it always existed or were unable to determine its nature in ambiguous cases. Like d’Albert’s scrutiny of Théodore, medical examination was often powerless to reveal “true sex,” and much like Maupin’s own self-identification as a member of a “third sex,” a number of doctors believed that a third sex did, in fact, exist, with many even attempting to modify the Civil Code to reflect this fact.

The very same year that *Mademoiselle de Maupin* appeared, in 1835, Dr. Dany published a remarkable case history of Joseph/Josephine Badré, which opens with a novelistic rendering of Badré’s upbringing and youth composed in the literary *passé simple*.⁹⁷ The account includes mistaken identity, cross-dressing, a number of peripeteia, sexual exploits, dishonesty, and penetrating visual analysis. The considerable suspense cultivated by Badré’s story is resolved only at the denouement, when the patient, having succumbed to a sudden bout of pneumonia, is autopsied, revealing a single atrophied and undescended testicle that appeared to doctors to have stopped developing early in gestation. Badré had formed the basis of an earlier medical examination and resulting publication, and both case histories combine technical, detached clinical analysis with the kind of creativity that one associates more with literature.⁹⁸ For example, Badré’s dishonesty about his ability to ejaculate garners almost as much speculation as the description of the autopsy itself, and which Dr. Dany ultimately hypothesizes was motivated by “a feeling of vanity or the desire to generate more interest” (1835, 462). Meegan Kennedy has shown that such “discursive hybridity,” especially in early nineteenth-century case histories, contributed to the genre’s natural structure of suspense and resolution by highlighting the physician’s insight as much as his clinical observation and command of medical technology.⁹⁹

As we saw in Part I, doctors (like Guermontez and the medico-legal expert Tardieu) sometimes relied on their professional reputation as observers in order to justify their authoritative claims, even when evidence was lacking. In addition to sharing a narrative structure that privileged close observation as a means to decipher – as much as to cultivate suspense – certain of the terms used in Gautier’s novel to assess Maupin’s sex reappear in Badré’s case study (such as the French word “duvet” for slight facial

hair). The medical case includes, moreover, a novelistic rendition of how Badré came to believe that his sex had been incorrectly determined at birth:

Age, as it were, by developing the organs, soon made hair [duvet] appear on the upper lip and chin, which, light at first, soon took on a certain thickness. The young Badré had already noticed, while frolicking with his female companions, that they did not offer the same characteristics that he observed in himself, and by examining himself with renewed attention, he confirmed his belief that an error had been committed in his case. Ashamed to appear among women in a costume that so singularly contrasted with his pronounced signs of virility, he adopted the resolution to switch clothing and to arrive in Paris under the name of *Joseph Badré*.¹⁰⁰

Like the fictional character Maupin, Badré changed clothing and embarked on a fresh start, hoping, like Abel Barbin after him, that the anonymity of the capital would mean a new beginning.

Gautier's "Monstrous Genre"

Relying on a kind of hybrid epistolary form, Gautier is able to defer the revelation of Mademoiselle de Maupin's "true sex" until nearly the end of the novel. This unique rhetorical strategy involves both letters in the traditional form of the epistolary novel – in which characters describe their inner thoughts and feelings to a close friend – and a narrator who summarizes events, as he puts it "in the ordinary shape of a novel" (1: 332).¹⁰¹ As Gautier himself remarked by describing the novel as a "monstrous genre" (*genre monstre*), the novel's structure mirrors the dual gender identity of its central protagonist (1: 244). This hybrid approach allows Gautier to project the illusion of mystery long after the reader discovers that Théodore de Sérannes and Mademoiselle de Maupin are the same person. In chapter 6, the narrator already hints that Théodore might be a woman when a partially unbuttoned blouse reveals unusual contours:

[. . .] the beginning of a certain rounded line difficult to explain on the chest of young boy; looking at it closely, one might have also found that the hips were a little too developed. The reader will think of it what he will; these are mere conjectures that we offer to him: we do not know more about it than he, but we hope to learn more in a little while, and we promise to faithfully keep him informed of our discoveries. May the reader, if he has a better view than we, penetrate his gaze under the lace of this blouse, and decide in good conscience whether the contour is too much or too little pronounced. But we warn him that the curtains are drawn and that only a twilight ill-suited to these sorts of investigations reigns in the room. (1: 334)

Gautier's narrator flirtatiously invites readers to test their own skills as observers and to decipher bodily signs, but there is nothing clinical about the erotic overtones of his diction. Even though the narrator coyly writes shadows into his scene in order to force the reader to read on to discover Maupin's identity, the novel itself will ultimately highlight the difficulty of interpreting the human body in a fashion akin to Latouche's *Fragoletta*, and to medical case studies.¹⁰² This "warning" or "introduction," as "avertissement" can sometimes mean, foreshadows the end of the novel in its refusal to restore the protagonist to binary gender.

Although the reader now knows Théodore's secret, the mystery persists for Rosette and d'Albert, and the latter, especially, waits in torment, vacillating between the belief that the person he loves must be truly a woman, and the knowledge that, even "If I came to know with certainty that Théodore is not a woman, alas! I do not know at all whether I would not still love him" (I: 381). Right up until the second to last page of the novel, d'Albert is not sure if Théodore is a woman at all (I: 511). Here lies another of Gautier's innovations. Not only does Maupin take over the role of doctor; Gautier displaces the familiar label of "monster" from the androgynous, main character onto d'Albert.¹⁰³ The "monster" is no longer a perceived threat to the binary, but rather to heteronormativity. Finding himself sexually attracted to Théodore, d'Albert is forced to confront his own inner "monster" by acknowledging that the apparent young man is the exact embodiment of his ideal lover. As Kari Weil finely puts it, Madeleine de Maupin is the "mirror to the sexual ambivalence he must recognize in himself."¹⁰⁴ Weil has intuited a hallmark of representations of androgyny that was originally introduced by Latouche. Unlike d'Albert, however, d'Hauteville is unable to evolve as a character and remains equally blind to his own attraction to androgyny. Incapable of recognizing his own role in Camille's disappearance, he is instead condemned to interpreting "her" absence as an impenetrable mystery.

All the novels that use unknown gender as a motor for the plot underscore the difficulty of interpreting the naked body, and they often reference one another in an intertextual web. Gautier alludes to the multi-layered ambiguities of the final scene of Latouche's *Fragoletta* in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. In Gautier's rendition, Rosette unbuttons the blouse of Théodore's young page, Isnabel, in an attempt to revive him after a riding accident (I: 355). Discovering a "fine pair" of breasts on the young Isnabel, Rosette immediately assumes that the adolescent is Théodore's lover rather than applying her discovery to a reevaluation of the mysterious Théodore: instead of imagining that Théodore's own bosom might reserve a similar surprise, the scorned

lover apparently berates Théodore for the impropriety of parading *his* young lover around with *him*. Again, interpreting the body reveals as much about the interpreter as the body under scrutiny. Here we learn of Rosette's unfounded jealousy and vivid imagination rather than about the "true" identity of Isnabel. (Isnabel is not Théodore's lover; she is a child rescued from a would-be pedophile.) Moreover, the ensuing fight between Théodore and Rosette provides further caution about the dangers of interpretation. The reader witnesses their disagreement from afar, and cannot listen in, but Théodore seems shamed, since they "changed color several times throughout Rosette's story" (1: 456). Théodore's legible discomfort mirrors the priest's visceral response in *Fragoletta*. While Rosette might interpret Théodore's blushing cheeks as confirmation of her fears about Isnabel, Théodore may just as likely feel embarrassment or fear because of how close Rosette is to discovering a bodily secret. Because Gautier credits Latouche's *Fragoletta* as the inspiration for his novel, there can be little doubt that he intends this scene as a homage to the earlier work, and that he thereby voluntarily inscribes a place for *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in a long line of intersex novels. What is most fascinating about this choice is that although Maupin is the only character among those novels who is not intersex, but rather a transing person, Gautier nevertheless refuses to assign Maupin a "true sex."¹⁰⁵ Instead, Maupin famously describes herself as a member of the "third sex":

Neither one nor the other of these two sexes is my own; I have neither the foolish submissiveness, nor the timidity, nor the pettiness of women. I do not have the vices of men either, their disgusting, vile nature and their brutal tendencies; – I am of a third sex altogether that does not yet have a name; higher or lower than them, inferior or superior. I have the body and the soul of a woman, the mind and the strength of a man, and I have too much or not enough of one or the other to be able to pair up with either. (1: 505)

Like fellow literary hermaphrodites Clémentine, Camille, and Séraphîta/Séraphitüs, Maupin shares their inability to fully integrate into society.¹⁰⁶ Like Badré, Maupin does not feel that their clothing reflects their identity. Although their body is not the obstacle, Maupin disavows belonging to either sex. For Maupin, this rejection of the binary is a conscious choice rather than a forced punishment: both sexes are fraught with undesirable flaws such that choosing exile amounts to intentional rebellion and the only tolerable solution. Maupin's triumphant reclaiming of the term "third sex" is also a political act that turns away from doctors like Bouillaud, who, as we saw in the second chapter, had attempted to use it as a way to secure a civil death sentence for individuals who could not be neatly categorized as

either male or female. By suggesting that Maupin's identity "does not yet have a name," Gautier both signals the current insufficiency of language to describe nonbinary gender and gestures hopefully to a future when perhaps it will. Understanding *Mademoiselle de Maupin's* place among the unknown gender novels reveals the stakes of Gautier's initially surprising refusal to deny nineteenth-century readers the satisfaction of fully revealing "true sex." If Latouche took the first step by dissociating "true sex" from a tally of body parts in *Fragoletta*, Gautier takes the next by questioning the social and cultural underpinnings of binary gender.

Seen in this light, Gautier's refusal to recount Théodore/Rosalinde's final night might also constitute an allusion to Latouche's novel. This scene marks the novel's famous culmination when Maupin consummates their love with d'Albert and then slips into Rosette's room to spend the rest of the night with her. Just as Latouche never fully unveils Fragoletta's body, the narrator never gains access to what happened in Rosette's bed: "What [Maupin] said and did there, I never could figure out [. . .] I have made a thousand conjectures on the subject, each more preposterous than the one before, and so outrageous that I really do not dare to set them down on paper, even with the most respectable, euphemistic style" (I: 372). Of course, this titillating rhetorical strategy offers a convenient way to insinuate lesbianism without getting into trouble for describing it too clearly. Not only is the body difficult to read; Gautier suggests more radically that gender identity does not determine sexuality. To the end then, Maupin remains faithful to their initial project of experimentation and discovery. The nineteenth-century confines of literary decorum dictate, however, that the reader be denied those insights.

Gautier's rehearsal of the unattainability of bodily truth in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* echoes *Fragoletta*. Even though Madeleine/Théodore is more idealized than Camille/Philippe, the impenetrable mystery remains. Gautier has simply transferred the dilemma to an aesthetic one. If Madeleine de Maupin cannot wake up next to d'Albert, it is not because their love represents some kind of "monstrosity" by nineteenth-century standards, as was the case in *Fragoletta*, but because to be with him more than the one night would be to wreck the illusion of perfection that Maupin exudes. This is an extension of the often-repeated line from the novel's preface: "There is really nothing beautiful unless it can serve for nothing; everything that is useful is ugly."¹⁰⁷

Despite the diversity of their techniques, all of the doubtful sex novels share a description of the human body that resists full interpretation. Barthes's hermeneutic code, which displaces revelation to motivate further

reading, remains incompletely resolved at the denouement. Just when it seems that “true sex” has at last been revealed (when Fragoletta’s blouse is unbuttoned, Mademoiselle de Maupin spends the last night with d’Albert, or Séraphîta ascends to the heavens), that very moment ends up prolonging the mystery of their identities. In its own way, each novel suggests that binary sex is unable to circumscribe bodily diversity. Yet, lest we assign too revolutionary and subversive a status to our novelists, it is important to remember that they also announce that non-normative identities have no place in nineteenth-century France. Maupin absconds in the night; Fragoletta dies by the sword; Séraphîta rejoins heaven. Even Clémentine, the only androgyne allowed to live happily ever after, still must do so in relative obscurity, forgotten to the world.

By reading canonical literature in the context of overlooked or popular fiction, we can come to better appreciate the historical significance of classic literary texts. *Fragoletta* enables us to decipher the meaning behind the hermeneutic code’s unresolved nature in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. And yet, because of the enduring critical belief in an ahistorical “myth of androgyny” that is unrelated to intersex, this parallel has remained uninvestigated for too long. Latouche teaches us something about the illegibility of bodies that is crucially important for understanding what is at stake in Mademoiselle de Maupin’s articulation of a third sex. Gautier’s appropriation of medical discourse reveals the limitations of the clinical gaze while calling into question the very meaning of “monstrosity.” Throughout nineteenth-century French literature, the mystery of uncertain sex teaches us as well that sexual economy remains everywhere closely tied to textual economy, so that reading the one becomes inextricable from deciphering the other.