On the last page, with his anomalous body arrayed in grave-clothes and laid in a coffin, Laurence, the hermaphrodite, speaks to us. He may or may not be dead, but he is certainly conscious. As he puts it, “[m]y brain was now excited to a vivid consciousness of the horror of my fate” (Howe, H 198). As we now know, Laurence’s fate—or at least the fate of the Laurence manuscript—was to rest unregarded for nearly a century and a half among the many unpublished letters, journals, and manuscripts that are Julia Ward Howe’s paper legacy before its—and his—resurrection for public viewing in 2004.

This unclassifiable work has driven a surge in interest in Julia Ward Howe at the turn of the twenty-first century. Before its publication, late-twentieth-century readers knew Howe, if at all, as the author who rewrote the mid-nineteenth century marching song “John Brown’s Body” as “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Apotheosized by artists as diverse as Marian Anderson, Elvis Presley, and Judy Garland, and regularly featured in events like the Day of Prayer service at Washington’s National Cathedral three days after September 11, 2001, the words of the “Battle Hymn” defined Howe as spokeswoman for U.S. patriotism, faith, and activism in righteous causes. Occasionally, Howe was also remembered as an ardent campaigner for women’s rights (and particu-
larly women’s colleges) in the 1860s–70s, or as the founder of Mother’s Day. These somewhat sentimental characterizations might have surprised those who knew the woman as a daring poet. Nathaniel Hawthorne was among many who admired her first collection, *Passion-Flowers*, despite feeling that because the poems “let out a whole history of domestic unhappiness,” “the devil must be in the woman” who would choose to publish them (Hawthorne, *Hawthorne, CE* 17:177). Howe did not hesitate to make her marital difficulties public in her poetry. Married to a prominent doctor and abolitionist who had achieved early fame by assisting the Greeks in their fight for freedom from the Turks, she spent much of her married life fighting for her own fame and freedom, achieving a sense of personal equilibrium and purpose only after her husband’s death in 1876. But a century later, Julia Ward Howe was more likely to be thought of as an icon of American “family values” than as a passionate rebel.

For twenty-first century readers and critics, the resurrection of the mysterious Laurence changed everything. Laurence’s tale—of his ambiguous sexuality, the decision of his parents to raise him male, his aborted liaison with a beautiful widow, his alliance with sixteen-year-old Ronald for whom he becomes a love object, his tutelage at the hands of a Roman nobleman Berto and his family, his crucifixion on a cross of love—is literally like nothing else in nineteenth-century American literary history. No other antebellum American writer ventured into territory even remotely close to Howe’s contemplation of a being who dresses alternately as a man and as a woman and who understands that “fervent hearts must borrow the disguise of art, if they would win the right to express, in any outward form, the internal fire that consumes them” (Howe, *H* 121). Its emergence propels us to rethink our image of Howe, but, more important, it forces us to reexamine what we thought we knew about the range of possibilities entertained by writers in Howe’s era concerning variations in sex, gender, and sexuality. As our understanding of the history of ideas about sex shifts, our present is also changed. The essays in this collection begin to map this altered territory, past, present and future.

Aside from a brief mention in a letter to her sister and a mysterious diary entry, Julia Ward Howe left no information about the composition of the manuscript we now know as *The Hermaphrodite*. We can only guess at the circumstances of its creation. Perhaps she sat at a heavy wooden desk (we know from the photographs that later in her life her study was ornately furnished), or perhaps she sat at a delicate table in a public room. Since the time frame is not certain, it is not clear whether Howe worked on the manuscript in her rented palazzo in Rome or in a drafty apartment in the Perkins Institution building on the outskirts of Boston, or if she started it after she’d
moved to “Green Peace,” her cottage near Perkins. Perhaps she worked with her young daughters nearby, but at least at Green Peace she had a private “den” that afforded refuge. Howe was pregnant with her third child in 1847 when she wrote the letter to her sister that mentioned that she had written “quite a little romance” that winter (Williams, HH 80).

Despite the distractions of childbearing and childrearing and moving back and forth from Italy to Boston and from Boston to Newport, the surviving pages offer evidence of some thoughtful revision. A few pages are carefully cut and reassembled with reddish blobs of wax, the Victorian precursor to cellophane tape. The separate sections of the manuscript, in slightly different hands and on different types of paper, also show that Howe returned to the project at several different times, possibly over the course of years. An entry from a diary begun in 1843 (but most likely from a period several years later) presents an extract of a letter to an unknown correspondent that probably describes an early version of *The Hermaphrodite*:

> My pen has been remarkably busy during the last year—it has brought me some happy inspirations, and though the golden tide is now at its ebb, I live in the hope that it may rise again in time to float off the stranded wreck of a novel, or rather story, in which I have been deeply engaged for three months past. It is not, understand me, a moral and fashionable work destined to be published in three volumes, but the history of a strange being, written as truly as I know how to write it. Whether it will ever be published, I cannot tell, but I should like to have you read it, and to talk with you about it. (quoted in Williams, HH 81)

At some point, Howe put the manuscript away. She would never publish a novel, though in subsequent years she published collections of poetry, plays, philosophical essays, travel narratives and even a biography. Howe’s reasons for abandoning the project are as mysterious as her reasons for embarking on it. Perhaps she feared that the subject matter was too embarrassing—though her willingness to publish the personally revealing poems in *Passion-Flowers* makes the case for prudence weak. It’s also possible that she found the manuscript unwieldy and strange and could not decide how to fit the sections together. Maybe she was unable to float the “stranded wreck.”

Or maybe Howe finished the book, pulling all of the parts together into a single internally coherent narrative. And then perhaps she put it by, deciding to keep it completely private or to share it with one or two intimate friends. Having finished it and deciding not to publish (because it was not “moral,” or because it was not “fashionable,” or both), she may have decided to store
it in a safe place. Perhaps she lost that final draft in one of her many moves. Conversely, it is possible that Howe decided to destroy the novel because she was dissatisfied with it. The papers that remain may be parts of early drafts that were overlooked when Howe actively tried to destroy the novel, or they might represent the closest thing to a final draft that Howe preserved with care, or they may have another completely different history. We simply don’t know.

At any rate, the surviving manuscript was for decades relatively easy to overlook because it did not have a first page or a title page. The preserved manuscript was a jumble of pages—the closest to a possible first page begins midsentence, on a page that is carefully numbered with a “2.” It is possible that Howe removed the first page in order to hide the manuscript in plain sight. If her first page was embellished with a provocative title or subtitle, removing it might have been a conscious, cautious strategy for rendering the manuscript invisible. Of course it is also possible that page 1 was lost by accident and that Howe or her loving literary-executor daughters preserved the fragments carefully and felt frustration and annoyance over the missing first page. Or that the daughters (like contemporary scholars) were overwhelmed by the sheer amount of their mother’s manuscript materials and simply bundled this folder with the rest, unaware of its peculiar nature. All of this is speculation. For at least a century, *The Hermaphrodite* manuscripts were shrouded in mystery.

What we know for certain is that Howe’s granddaughter Rosalind Richards bequeathed a voluminous portion of the papers to Harvard University’s Houghton Library in 1951. *The Hermaphrodite* was included in the part of the collection that was described (as it still is) as “10 boxes of unsorted prose manuscripts and speeches.” There is no public record of who examined the ten unsorted boxes, nor is it clear that everyone who looked through the boxes would necessarily have noticed the strange wreck of a novel deposited in one box along with a number of unsorted old letters and drafts of speeches.

We can surmise that Deborah Pickman Clifford, a collateral descendant of Howe, looked through the papers as she was preparing her 1979 general-audience biography, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*. But Clifford does not mention the strange manuscript. This lacuna is relatively typical of Clifford’s approach to Howe’s private papers. There are many disparities between the abridged story Clifford tells about the early married life of Julia Ward and the much richer narrative emerging from the huge store of unpublished letters and journals in the Houghton. *The Hermaphrodite* is just one among many private papers that Clifford does not engage.
The first scholar to publish anything about the fragmentary novel was Mary H. Grant, whose dissertation on Howe eventually appeared in print in 1994. Grant’s *Private Woman, Public Person: An Account of the Life of Julia Ward Howe from 1819 to 1868* was published as #5 in a series edited by Gerda Lerner called “Scholarship in Women’s History: Rediscovered and New,” eleven notable works that had for various reasons not moved in a timely way from dissertation to book. Grant had finished her graduate work in history at The George Washington University in 1982, relying heavily on Harvard’s Howe collections to uncover (as Lerner noted in her introduction) “a freer, more powerful and creative writer beneath the persona of the author of ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’ than we have hitherto known” (Lerner xvi). Freer indeed: Grant described a text so free that—one would think—it could not possibly be ignored.

Grant situated the manuscript in her discussion of other fragments from the mid-1850s, introducing it as an unpublished novel she titled *Eva and Raphael* [sic]:

Apparently it was begun as a play in the 1840s, possibly around 1847. After several false starts, Julia gave it up until the 1850s, when she changed the cast of characters. The play then became a novel and a minor character, Laurent (or Laurence), became the protagonist. Although this work is incomplete, the remaining fragments are sufficient to provide a rough story line. The tale concerns not Eva and Raphael so much as Laurence/Laurent, an androgynous character, reared and educated as a man but renounced, at the age of twenty-two, by his father for his sexual inability to perpetuate the family name. (Grant 121)

Grant’s discussion of the text (or texts) would surely have awakened interest in those who mentored her project at George Washington University. She observed that its story is “exactly the sort of novel that a Victorian (or any) father might forbid his daughter to read. One taboo subject after another appears: seduction, rape, madness, confused sexual identity, sodomy, and that particularly Victorian horror—the burial of a person still alive” (Grant 122).

Gary Williams read Grant’s book in July 1995 while at work at the Houghton on the study that eventually became *Hungry Heart: The Literary Emergence of Julia Ward Howe* (1999). He had not previously seen the manuscript fragments she described, nor any reference to them in Houghton’s catalogs—yet there they were in, as it were, plain sight. Questions burgeoned. On what grounds had Grant determined its dates of composition? The fragments were
in a neat hand that matched Howe’s writing in a wide range of her pre-Civil War holographs, but the folder was undated except for a cryptic note (not in Howe’s hand) reading “Joseph Willard Feb. 1851” on a blue sheet at the front of the first folder. Pages in three sections of the collection were numbered, but without apparent reference to each other, despite the fact that two of them shared characters and a tonally consistent narrative voice. Pages in the top folder in the box—what Grant had referred to as the novel or play called *Eva and Raphael*—were out of numerical order. How had Grant settled which of the pieces were “false starts” and which were later accretions? Why did she call Laurence a “minor character” who “became” the protagonist, when he doesn’t appear in the Eva–Rafael section at all? Why, aside from its position in the top folder, did Grant consider the Eva–Rafael episode the root story and the Laurence episodes the development?

Beyond these and many other questions about the physical manuscript rose questions about the reasons for its continuing obscurity. What had happened in the dozen or so years since Mary Grant’s dissertation was filed in 1982? Was it the sheer bulk of unpublished and only nominally sorted materials in the Howe collection that kept any one piece within it—even such an obviously volatile piece—from coming sharply into focus for her or those who mentored her? Had the fact that Grant had conducted her study under the provenance of a history department determined the kinds of questions she was trained to pose? Had others possibly been deterred from examining it by Grant’s own inclination to downplay the interest of the narrative? Grant had published an article about Howe in a collection edited by Mary Kelley in 1979, but nothing since, and her footnote regarding the significance of the manuscript suggests a decision not to make too much of it: “The possible interpretations seem both limitless and limited, for although numerous ideas spring to mind, this is still only one piece of evidence rescued from a lifetime of writing and dreaming. Any interpretation, too, must be balanced by the recognition that normal, happy people may have weird fantasies from time to time” (Grant 227). What had become of Mary Grant?

(Although Williams was not aware of it at the time, in 1993 another scholar had opened the box at the Houghton and had been stunned by the Laurence manuscripts. Two years almost to the day before Williams read them, Valarie Ziegler had begun looking at the ten boxes and, like Grant, had concluded that the work began with Eva and Rafael. Ziegler and Williams eventually crossed paths in 1998 in Pullman, Washington, at a Howe symposium hosted by the journal *ESQ* and its editor Albert von Frank; they began to exchange notes and perceptions. Her reading would find expres-
But back to 1995. Williams’s questions about the prolonged invisibility of the manuscript soon gave way to questions of interpretation. Grant had—inevitably—been struck by its queer aspects. Laurence’s adventures, she wrote, “all revolve around his ambiguous sexual attraction. In one, Emma, a mature and beautiful widow, believing Laurence to be a man, falls in love with him and attempts to seduce him in a scene remarkable for its candid portrayal of feminine sexual drive” (Grant 121). And further: “The story ends on a note of crisis. Roland [sic], an adolescent who befriended Laurent earlier, has come to believe that Laurent is a woman. After a dueling scene in which he is stabbed, a bleeding Roland staggers into Laurent’s room and attempts to rape him” (Grant 122). Despite her apparently brief time with the various pieces of the text and her reluctance to over-read it, Grant’s comments outlined an interpretation that constructs the text as autobiography. The issue for her was what the text suggested about Julia’s own sexuality: “Clearly the novel offered an opportunity for Julia to express the sexual feelings which were stifled in her life” (Grant 122). Grant called attention to Emma von P’s rich, mature sexual power—unfulfilled though her desire is—and to the novel’s argument for the vanishing distinctions between women and men once women are given access to a superior education. But she also noted the sadness surrounding Laurence’s sexually ambiguous existence. Lacking clear gender definition, a person was doomed to “loneliness, misunderstanding, and pain” (Grant 123)—a perception Grant believed brought Julia to reject whatever in her own nature might be hermaphroditic. In the Berto portion of the text, Grant saw “sexual restraint, . . . sexuality held in abeyance, . . . true sexual natures disguised, undisclosed, undiscovered” (Grant 247–48). Berto’s sister Briseida, she suggested, was Julia’s mouthpiece for analysis of women’s threatened and bound condition—a character admirable for her insight and relative freedom, whose circumstances were completely enviable and totally unavailable to Julia.

Grant’s views spoke forcibly to Williams. Reading Howe’s letters in the Houghton three years before, he had already begun to feel that earlier published biographies of Howe had masked, rather than revealed, the woman behind the *Passion-Flowers* poems—that there was a story beneath the stories, one involving the crypto-homosexual Charles Sumner and the marriage difficulties of the Howes (first brought to focus for contemporary scholars by James Wallace’s 1990 *American Literature* article, “Hawthorne and the Scribbling Women Reconsidered”). Surfacing from that first immersion, Williams
had noted in his own journal the “seductive mystery” of these fragments of lives.

The more he pondered it, the more Williams was persuaded that a particular sort of marital discord was at the root of Julia’s decision to publish her first book of poems. The poems themselves, he speculated, were the covert record of Julia’s accommodation to her husband’s affection for Charles, and also her revenge. Williams’s attention focused on Charles Sumner and the deflections of homosexual desire in antebellum American culture. His first conference paper on the subject bizarrely anticipated the pages still hidden away in the Houghton. When the manuscript surfaced for him two years later, Williams was tempted to believe that he had written it himself, by way of illustration of his conviction.

It took some time to wean himself from the certainty that the manuscript’s primary significance resided in Julia’s efforts to somehow depict her husband as Laurence—to understand Samuel Gridley Howe’s indifference to her (and responsiveness to Charles Sumner) as corporeal, a principle of his very constitution. In his first attempt to write about it (a paper for the 1997 American Literature Association meeting in Baltimore), he leaned heavily on the relationship between Laurence and Ronald, and particularly on Laurence’s professed discomfort with the erotic elements in Ronald’s love for him. Other parts of the narrative—the Berto section, the Eva–Rafael fable—got little attention, as did difficulties in the Howe marriage beyond their interactions about Sumner. Those, he lingered over. He made much of Samuel Howe’s letter to Sumner in which he reports Julia’s conviction that Sumner ought to have been a woman, so that Howe could have married “her,” and he concluded that although Sumner was possibly not the sole cause of the discord between the Howes, he “grew to be for Julia more or less the focus of it.”

Hungry Heart interpreted Laurence as the “beautiful monster” Howe discovered she had married, but the book also pointed toward another interpretation of the character, one that Grant had hinted at but declined to develop. In an endnote, Williams suggested that Laurence might be understood as “Howe’s guilty sense of herself, a being fusing culturally ascribed impulses of both genders and thereby consigned to a loveless and sexless existence” (HH 240). More generally, he urged the book’s usefulness as a basis for new speculation about the nineteenth century’s understanding of gender assignment. Several reviews of Hungry Heart, expressing fascination with the Laurence manuscript, underscored this need. Wendy Dasler Johnson, writing in Legacy, devoted the majority of her review to the unpublished text; intrigued by this unprecedented work, she was also gently critical of the degree to which
Williams’s insistence on autobiography “tend[ed] to preclude possible alternative readings” (Wendy Johnson 234). But the question of how precisely to understand Laurence was deferred for the moment, and, thanks to the enterprise of Sharon M. Harris, then co-editor of Legacy, plans began in the summer of 2000 to create and publish an edition of the manuscript. Williams’s projected volume was to be the first in a new book series edited by Harris and Karen Dandurand, Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers.

By the time the volume was published in 2004 under the provocative title of The Hermaphrodite (the title chosen by the University of Nebraska Press’s marketing division), scholarly interest in the manuscript had already been generated by Hungry Heart and Diva Julia. Scholars of nineteenth-century American women’s writing were eager to get their hands on the book. In the spring of 2005, Karen Sánchez-Eppler and Elizabeth Young hosted a meeting of the Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers Study Group that focused solely on The Hermaphrodite. More than fifty professors attended the meeting. At the meeting, Williams and Renée Bergland announced their intention to gather a collection of essays, and invited contributions from the discussants. This collection is the result.

Since 2005, The Hermaphrodite has become a staple of the nineteenth-century American literature curriculum. In 2008, Bergland included an excerpt from The Hermaphrodite in the Howe section that she contributed to The Heath Anthology of American Literature, making it widely available to undergraduates. Students, like their professors, have responded to the text with great interest. The very qualities that made earlier scholars hesitant about The Hermaphrodite make today’s readers eager to consider it. The text contributes to a seismic shift in how we understand nineteenth-century gender awareness and sexuality in antebellum America.

As Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz explains in Rereading Sex (2003), seventeenth-century Americans tended to understand human anatomy in terms of the “one-sex” model described by Thomas Laqueur. Sex organs, in this model, were basically the same, regardless of whether they were male or female. Male genitalia were outside the body, while female reproductive organs were tucked inside. But that was the only significant difference. This understanding of anatomy lent a certain flexibility to sex identity: In early America, it was possible to imagine a female turning male if her sex organs popped outside of her body. Such accidental sex-changes didn’t happen, but because they were possible in theory, there was something oddly non-essentialist about early American understandings of sex and gender. Although males and females had different places in family and social hierarchies, the difference was not necessarily imagined as physiological in its origin.
Because sexual difference was not inherently tied to anatomical difference (and because medicine was not solidified as a profession), doctors were not the authorities on sexual matters. When a person’s sex was hard to determine, as in the case of Thomas/Thomasine Hall in Virginia in 1629, Americans turned to the courts, and American judges called on many witnesses, including doctors and midwives, but also numerous bystanders (Reis 10). In puritan New England around the same time, the legal system was closely tied to the church, and sex identity, sexual relationships, and even sexual desires were religious questions as well as legal ones. When Mary Dyer gave birth to a stillborn child with “monstrous” features in 1637, John Winthrop, John Cotton, and Thomas Weld all preached sermons offering religious interpretations of the physiological anomalies (Reis 4).

If the seventeenth century saw sex as a religious matter as well as a legal matter, by the end of the eighteenth century, sex had also started to become a question of aesthetics. Romanticism valorized androgyny, framing artistic genius as a perfect blend of masculinity and femininity. But the androgynous ideals of Romantic genius cut two ways: though male Romantics were often perceived as extraordinarily attractive because of their feminine qualities, female Romantics risked being perceived as monstrous because of their masculinity. Margaret Fuller, who saw herself as an androgynous woman of genius, reported that such women tended to “frighten those around them” (Fuller, Woman 91).

Julia Ward met Margaret Fuller around the same time that she met Samuel Gridley Howe, who was a medical doctor. Her understanding of sex identity drew on Romantic paradigms that had dominated the start of the nineteenth century at least as much as it drew on the medical models of sex and sex identity that would prevail by the end of the century. She tangled questions of ethics and religious philosophy, law and inheritance, aesthetics and romantic idealization, and family structures and social mores together in her novel, reserving the ambiguous pronouncements of “Medicus,” the voice of medicine, for its final, inconclusive pages.

The manuscript resists the medicalization of sex, just as it refuses any authoritative singular interpretation. Although it is possible that Howe may have finished a version of her novel, the manuscript that survived is unfinished in every way. Like its narrator, it resists categorization and even pushes back against coherence. It’s a mess. And in that respect, it seems wholly appropriate that the text was finally published in the twenty-first century. Current understandings of sex identity as a richly multiplicitous area open to philosophical as well as physiological interrogation make the manuscript legible for twenty-first century readers in a way that it might not have been for
a nineteenth-century audience. Perhaps a postmodern sense of comfort with the unfinished and the fragmentary also contributes significantly to the new appreciation for the manuscript. For students and scholars in the twenty-first century, the fact that *The Hermaphrodite* is a “stranded wreck of a novel” may be almost as compelling as the fact that it tells the strange “history of a strange being.”

Many years after she had stopped work on *The Hermaphrodite*, Julia Ward Howe published a passionate defense of women’s education, in which she remarked, “The philosophy of sex is thus far little understood in America, or anywhere else” (Howe, *Sex* 24). Her comment can be read as a call to arms or as an honest expression of confusion. This essay collection, *Philosophies of Sex*, uses Howe’s work to explore mid-nineteenth century American philosophies and confusions about sex and sexuality and about a range of other topics growing out of this focus. *The Hermaphrodite* brings forward a host of questions. It is destabilizing and difficult in ways that create an urgent need for interpretive frameworks. This collection begins to build those frameworks and hopes to foster an ongoing conversation among an infinite array of possible interpretations.

One incidental question answered in these pages is, “What became of Mary Grant?” Grant herself fills in the blanks in a foreword to this volume that invokes the excitement and frontier spirit of women’s history in the 1970s. Grant encountered the manuscripts under conditions bemusingly similar to those Howe experienced in producing them, feverishly taking notes during her spring break in 1977 while a friend watched her infant daughter. Also like Howe, Grant was obliged to contemplate the figure of Laurence mainly in isolation, potential discussion of this strange character inhibited by others’ unawareness of its existence and her own sense of being in territory for which she had no trustworthy map. Finally—and again with eerie echoes of her dissertation subject’s life—Grant narrates her own efforts to find a niche within a patriarchal structure from which she could offer guidance and intellectual nurture to young women, as teacher and then administrator for independent girls’ schools in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. This volume’s editors are delighted to reintegrate her perspective into ongoing discussions of Howe’s work.

The ten essays that constitute the heart of this collection exemplify the critical energy that Howe’s text has given rise to. Although collectively they could be said to offer a constellated argument for the novel’s pervasive engagement with the idea of indeterminacy, individually they lay out alternative and sometimes sharply conflicting readings of the text. Does Laurence’s ontological status bring him mainly sorrow, loneliness, and deprivation, or
is it instrumental in emancipating him from strictures that others take for granted and can’t see beyond? Does Howe’s work on this text mark a stage in a steady movement toward progressive feminist consciousness, or is it a sign of her entrapment in her age’s conventions regarding gender roles? Is she writing about metaphorical or physical sex? Is this text indebted more to European or to American understandings of social and aesthetic conventions? Is the text firmly of its time, or does it range across multiple temporal landscapes and thereby liberate itself altogether from the constraints of time? Does its contemporary reconstruction as a continuous narrative negate its fascinating indeterminacy as a collection of unrelated manuscript fragments? The very issue of how we are led to think about the ambiguities and oppositions that pervade Howe’s text appears strikingly different to different readers. This generative richness is on display in this collection.

Karen Sánchez-Eppler’s essay appropriately opens the collection with a focus on the text’s manuscripts, emphasizing that we must include unpublished work as part of what counts as American literature. She argues that Howe’s physically indeterminate protagonist offers a provocative occasion for consideration of the nature of material form—Howe “seeks a model of identity freed from gendered flesh and a model of writing loosed from the public expectations of print.” Work by Marianne Noble and Laura Saltz focuses on contextualizing the narrative within the frames of European and American Romanticism and of Howe’s other writings. Noble explores The Hermaphrodite as marking a pivotal stage in Howe’s developing feminism, seen in full bloom in several poems of her 1854 collection Passion-Flowers. Like Sánchez-Eppler, Noble underscores the impermanent, disjointed nature of Howe’s project, regarding it equally as product and process. Saltz’s essay on “Magnetic Sex,” drawing on two lectures that Howe delivered at the Concord School of Philosophy, explains the importance of the “both/and” model that the idea of polarity offered for nineteenth-century Romantic philosophers and scientists. Polarity opened remarkably generative avenues for scientific exploration, but it also presented cultural models that were as terrifying as they were liberating.

Essays by Betsy Klimasmith, Joyce Warren, and Gary Williams begin with explorations of intertextual connections between Howe’s novel and other groundbreaking nineteenth-century works on gender, sexuality, and relationship. Klimasmith focuses on the transatlantic conversation about “intersexuality in widely-read medical, erotic, and literary texts . . . in order to show how Howe appropriates and revises elements of these discourses in her own transatlantic text.” Klimasmith also juxtaposes European and American structures for relations between women and men, noting that The
Hermaphrodite is possibly the only mid-nineteenth-century novel in English that does not include a married couple among its characters. Joyce Warren focuses on fascinating links to another long-unpublished manuscript, Louisa May Alcott’s “A Modern Mephistopheles,” written in the 1860s and published in 1995 as A Long Fatal Love Chase. Warren finds analogies between the two writers in their “questioning of the social construction of gender that marked as ‘freak’ or ‘monster’ any woman who transgressed conventional boundaries.” Williams offers a detailed exploration of shared themes between Howe’s Laurence and George Sand’s 1839 novel/play Gabriel, another work featuring an intersexed character struggling to define satisfying relationships with both men and women. Williams notes the rarity of an American writer entertaining questions about the constructedness of gender but notes that both the American and the European ultimately concede that the “triumph of either/or over both/and can lead only to madness.”

Bethany Schneider, in a provocative close reading of chapter 16, considers parallels between Harriet Jacobs’s account of her sexual relations with slave masters and Laurence’s narration of his struggles with Ronald. Both encounters are framed as rapes, Schneider argues, and both are strategically “undertold,” but Laurence’s engagement with Ronald may in fact be a representation of a “successful and mutually enjoyable sexual exchange.”

Renée Bergland and Suzanne Ashworth explore The Hermaphrodite’s suggestive invocations of two other kinds of “texts”: sculpture and theology. Bergland offers speculative connections between real statues that Howe studied and the fictional statues around which The Hermaphrodite is structured, arguing that sculpture provided a locus for Howe’s meditations on the vexed connections and disconnections between bodies and souls, anatomies and identities. Suzanne Ashworth turns our attention to Emmanuel Swedenborg’s Conjugial Love (1768) to contend that Howe’s reading of Swedenborg helped her to develop a notion of the posthuman that underpins the entwined stories of Nina and Eva in the work’s final section. Ashworth draws intriguing lines from the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic through mid-nineteenth-century America’s fascination with spiritualism to twentieth-century posthumanist theory. Finally, Dana Luciano’s essay “Unrealized: The Queer Time of The Hermaphrodite” returns us to the questions of unfinished manuscripts, unfinished bodies, and ongoing processes of literary reconstruction. Michel Foucault’s perceptions about shifts in the basis for family structure provide a framework for analysis of Laurence’s relations with his father and brother; Luciano argues that Howe’s disjointed history of Lawrence’s ambiguous body ultimately invites us “not to redress a lack in the history of sexuality, but to take the measure of its forms and multiply its possibilities.”
The volume concludes with Elizabeth Young’s witty afterword, “Howe Now?” Young asks, “Now that Julia Ward Howe’s *Hermaphrodite* has been recovered, how should we reread the words for which she became famous, ‘Battle Hymn of the Republic’? What, in turn, is the legacy of these works for contemporary America?”—an America of both resurgent imperialism and an emergent movement for the “intersexed.” Young’s piece offers commentary on the complex echoes of Howe’s works in American culture today.

The work presented in this collection is emblematic of a robust critical interest not just in Howe’s remarkable narrative, but in finding ways to understand nineteenth-century American literature in terms that resonate for the twenty-first century. The experiences that several of the essayists have had in introducing this galvanic text in survey courses or in graduate seminars have shown that canonic staples are reinvigorated by efforts to understand them in the wider context Howe’s work creates. The editors offer these essays with the hope that they will encourage many long, rich, and generative conversations.

**Note**

1. JWH to Louisa, 31 March and 15 May 1847: “best of all, I am to have a den, leading out of the library, sacred to my books, my Prie Dieu, and my own thoughts. . . . I have fitted up a lovely oratoire, hung with muslin draperies, and my religious engravings—in a recess, lined with red, is Crawford’s lovely bas-relief of Apollo—my little brackets are placed on the walls, with statuettes on them—my Prie Dieu is there, with the crucifix elevated above it on a bracket supported by an angel’s head—my old chairs, and a little sofa complete the furniture of the room. . . .” (Julia Ward Howe Papers, MS Am 2119, Houghton Library).