Writers for most U.S. periodicals in the 1830s and ’40s—the years in which the novels of Balzac, Eugène Sue, Paul de Kock, and preeminently George Sand began to be noticed—regarded French writing as Satanic. Representative is a reviewer for Horace Greeley’s New-Yorker in 1836, provoked by Victor Hugo’s Lucretia Borgia: “Modern French literature is so atrociously corrupt that, whether its pictures be directly and openly subversive of moral rectitude or only descriptive of abominations which have or have not occurred, it is alike vicious and revolting” (New-Yorker 349). Private reaction in many quarters reflected this attitude. George Templeton Strong, New York attorney and indefatigable diary-keeper between 1835 and 1875, noted that although he felt obliged to learn French, “I’m ashamed of myself for complying so far with popular prejudices as to have aught to do with so despicable a dialect.” Before long he was dismissing it as the “miserable dialect of monkeys, hyenas, and man-milliners,” and after reading a work by Kock, he invoked Samuel Johnson’s view of Lord Chesterfield to express his opinion of the French: “possessing the manners (and the mind) of a dancing master and the morals of a whore” (Strong, vol. 1, 204, 287–90).

For others, however, French fiction created a potent imaginative space to explore cultural paradigms alternative to those they lived within. George
Sand’s writings and public persona, in particular, performed this work. Reading her novels, in some cases even simply reading reviews of her works, encouraged some Americans to interrogate the rigidity of standard nineteenth-century gender prescriptions. As Catherine Masson noted in 2003, most American intellectuals—“malgré des réticences”—considered Sand a great, even a very great writer (Masson 158).¹ The full account of these “réticences” remains to be told, although segments of the story exist piecemeal in studies of individual writers—Carolyn Karcher’s biography of Lydia Maria Child, for example, and Helen R. Deese’s edition of the diaries of Caroline Healey Dall (Karcher, First Woman 320, 328, 412; Dall).²

Two whose appreciation has gone mostly unremarked were Samuel Ward and his friend Henry Longfellow. Ward spent four years abroad in the 1830s, a good part of that period in Paris. When he returned to the U.S., he brought with him several of Sand’s early novels and thus was among the earliest American readers of her work. Beginning in 1836, Ward and Longfellow (whom Ward had also met abroad) carried on an epistolary conversation that frequently invoked French fiction and Sand’s in particular. When Longfellow began work on his autobiographical romance Hyperion in 1839, Ward was an enthusiastic reader of the manuscript, offering suggestions that indicate his extensive knowledge of French novels. Simultaneously he was himself penning a two-part article for The New York Review about Hyperion in the context of Balzac’s work. The exchange concerning these projects reveals important information about Sand’s presence—or, more accurately, her absence—in serious American discussion of fiction.

On April 25, 1839, Ward wrote that Joseph Cogswell, Ward’s mentor and the editor of The New York Review, had “circumscribed” the first part of Ward’s article, the section dealing with Balzac. “The deeper parts of the Study he left out,” Ward reported, adding drily that he and Cogswell “differed about the conclusions to be drawn from the History, nature & art of Romance—from its History as a chapter in the biography of the Human mind, from its nature as among the productions of the Kingdom of intelligence, and from the powers exercised in its creations and delineations.” And as if it weren’t enough to have had his enthusiasm for the literary value of Romance edited out, he seems also piqued at having had to muffle sentiments of a more specific kind. In this context, without transition, he continues:

George Sand is superior to Balzac. It is inconceivable how the free genius of that woman gives birth to ideas of the highest order of masculine beauty clothed in a language worthy of Rousseau. She displays none of the machinery a knowing eye can detect in Balzac. Whether it be to throw up a palace
in a few pages or to unfold a whole poem of Auto-biography—to summon the spirits of a drama and follow its lights & shades & scene shifttings—her pen is ever ready. I believe that she and La Mennais are the two first writers in France of the present day—and that France numbers now the best writers and most accomplished critics in the world.

A paragraph later, again abruptly, Ward returns to Sand: “Don't you want to read some of George Sand? I wish she might be criticized here—but a Reviewer would be forced to endure a censorious and moral [grimace?] and she is excessively heterodox. But the holiest painters have never refused to take prostitutes even—as models of beauty.”

Longfellow did, at Ward’s prompting, read Sand, though not immediately. His journal indicates that he began with Jacques, starting it in June 1840, and shortly after that read Spiridion, about which he wrote: “What a magnificent style the woman writes in! Truly there is more poetry in such prose, than in Racine’s so-called poetry.” Ward had encouraged him (June 20, 1840) by describing Spiridion as “the most tumultuous & true exhibit of possible passionate individuality I ever read” and observing how “strange” it was “that a woman should have depicted the heart of man.” But then Longfellow’s interest evidently flagged, for Ward wrote on July 8:

If “Spiridion” does not stimulate your thoughts it is because you have never indulged in speculations upon religious topics and suffered from doubt, or that your mind is made up. In fact, your life has been too full of intellectual exertion to permit that dreamy passion of useless reverie about matters impenetrable to overpower you.

The second sentence, with its suggestion that Sand’s novel might immobilize or stupefy, could be read as an indication that Ward’s own enthusiasm had waned. In fact, this state of “dreamy passion” was exactly what Ward was missing in his banker’s life on Wall Street and what he had believed he might retrieve for himself (and encourage in others) through writing about Balzac and Sand. Later in the letter Ward indscts the dancer Fanny Essler and George Sand for feeding on triumphs and reveling in ambition, instead of finding contentment in love. Further, he accuses such women of being “dangerous to [their] sex and to humanity.” But this apparent attack seems ironic, intended to prick the perennially phlegmatic Longfellow’s sense of what is worth attending to.

Ward continued to champion Sand’s talent and to send her works to Longfellow. He seems to have felt that if his poet friend could just catch a little
of Sand’s fire, his own works would benefit. His October 4, 1841, response to
the poet’s “Excelsior” praises the work’s “magical, electrical” effects and the
“mingled effect of poesy & music,” but chides that because “French Romances
prove barren to you as the East Wind,” Longfellow cannot appreciate or
appropriate the more galvanic poetic qualities of Sand’s works. “Her motto
is Excelsior,” Ward needles. Le Compagnon du Tour de France, which Ward
had just finished, seemed (Ward implies) much more likely than Longfellow’s
poem to “move thousands,” drawing its materials from the working classes
“with a truth, an earnestness, an absence of all pretension & of all exaggera-
tion & an entire unconsciousness of the public & indifference to its applause
or its censure—which invest the narrative with an almost apostolic quality.”

I have elsewhere traced the young Julia Ward’s exposure to Sand through
her brother Sam’s agency and have posited that reading Sand’s early works was
transformative, giving important impetus to Julia Ward Howe’s desire to be
a writer (Williams, HH 13–16; 240–41; Williams, “Speaking” ix–xlv). Howe
first wrote in 1861 of this impact, remembering stolen hours with a flickering
candle in a wintry room and how “the atmosphere grew warm and glorious
about us,—a true human company, a living sympathy crept near us,—the
very world seemed not the same world after as before” (Howe, “Sand” 514).
Even in much later life, when the “powerful ideas of life and character” that
Sand’s novels offered seem faded and readers had tired of hearing of “women
whose merit consists in their loving everything better than their husbands,”
Sand herself still burned in Howe’s memory as a purveyor of “wicked delight,”
a personage “not content to be either man or woman” who beckoned “like a
wild Bacchante” (Howe, Polite 39, 69; Fuller 135–36).

Among the Sand works that inspired these reactions, there is no men-
tion of a relatively minor piece, Gabriel, a novel in the form of a play written
in 1839 and published in three installments in the Revue des Deux Mondes. Howe’s papers contain no reference to Gabriel (though she could well have
read it, and probably did read Francis Bowen’s remarks on it in a North Amer-
ican Review essay on the 1839 Brussels edition of Sand’s works). But parallels
between Gabriel and The Hermaphrodite are striking: both provide a remark-
able window into the process of a female-identified writer trying to imagine
an existence unbound by the strictures of gender.

Sand’s work, set in Italy in the 1630s, tells of a female raised as a male
so that her branch of the family can maintain property rights. (Questions
of inheritance also play a significant role in Howe’s narrative.) At age sev-
enteen Gabriel does not know that she is female—in fact, she has been
raised to despise everything associated with women. Her tutor reassures her grandfather:

Since his earliest childhood he has been imbued with the grandeur of the masculine role, the abject condition of the feminine role in nature and society. The first paintings to strike his attention, the first facts of history to awaken his thoughts, showed him the weakness and subjection of the one sex, the freedom and power of the other. (Sand 7)

When the intentions and deceptions of her upbringing become known to her, Gabriel sets out to thwart her grandfather’s desires by meeting the (male) cousin whose inheritance rights she has unintentionally compromised. Despite the fact that she eventually claims her femaleness for the sake of an intimate relationship with her cousin (with whom she falls in love), Gabriel throughout the work is psychically hermaphroditic: “I don’t feel my soul is one sex or the other,” she muses in a speech responding to her tutor’s conventional essentializing of gender roles. “I want to know everything, feel everything, possess everything, brave everything!” (Sand 10, 14). This sentiment finds an echo in Howe’s narrative, in Berto’s ethos for educating Laurence: “Know that I abhor onesidedness, fixed idea, and all the insanities of the learned. . . . I desire to do entire justice to every fibre of my brain, every nerve and muscle of my body” (Howe, H 95).

Gabriel, still presenting herself as male, first encounters her cousin Astolphe in a down-and-dirty tavern. Astolphe is conspicuously steeped in male identity from his first entrance (Gabriel notes his “noble bearing” and envies “his masculine features, his large hands” [Sand 26]), and furthermore, Astolphe evaluates Gabriel’s actions and looks in terms of how male he is. After a bloody bar fight among gangsters and students, Gabriel and Astolphe wind up together in a jail cell. Bemused by Astolphe’s insouciance in the wake of the fight (during which both have killed someone), Gabriel is tempted to understand this difference between them as a manifestation of gender: “I seem to be the only one concerned with it, as if, in effect, my soul were of a different nature. . . . No, I will not accept that idea of female inferiority!” (Sand 34). Such distinctions on the basis of anatomy, Gabriel posits, are human-created and condemned by God. Later, while Gabriel sleeps, Astolphe looks at him/her and is conscious of strong and unexpected feelings—one of which is surprise that such a “beautiful boy . . . raised like a maid deep in an old castle” could kill so lightly. This meditation begins Astolphe’s own interrogation of the gender binary. “I feel I like that boy, I love such bravura in a delicate constitution,” he muses. “I’d like to have a mistress who looked like
him. But a woman would never have that kind of beauty, that candor mixed with strength” (Sand 36).

In the second act, set during Carnival in Florence, Astolphe, in pursuit of his androgynous fantasy, has persuaded Gabriel to go out dressed as a woman. Gabriel bristles at the confinements of female attire and finds his/her costume “indecent” (Sand 50), but is nonetheless struck by her beauty when she looks in the mirror. The moment evokes the sensation created in Théophile Gautier’s *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), in which Madeleine de Maupin, masquerading as a man, appears in costume as Rosalind in *As You Like It*: a female in male drag costumed as a woman. Pratima Prasad concisely describes the innovative qualities of Sand’s handling of this situation:

> Transvestism implies a transgression; it is based on the assumption of an inside core . . . that precedes the act of disguise, which the disguise then proceeds to “cross” or “transgress.” In masculine clothing, Gabriel can be said to be disguised since h/er anatomy is female. However, which gender boundaries can s/he be said to be crossing, if h/er gender identifications are mostly masculine and sometimes fluid? What if we consider the fact that the cross-dressed subject h/erself perceives her “inner” self as masculine and therefore considers her [usual] costume to be gender normative, not transgressive? On the other hand, when s/he is in feminine clothing, there is continuity between anatomy and costume; yet it functions as a disguise. . . . Exterior costume, whether masculine or feminine, is always already a travesty. (Prasad 341)

This scene also calls to mind its parallel in *The Hermaphrodite*, in which male-identified Laurence chooses a gender-neutral costume, a domino, in order to escape notice by “the crowd of squeaking and grinning buffoons” during the Roman Carnival and thereby better position himself as an observer (Howe, *H* 121). His insight—fueled by Berto’s perception that many in the crowd wear disguises “that they might act the truth” (Howe, *H* 121), hiding their faces in order to reveal their hearts—transcends gender considerations altogether: it is that fervent hearts in general are always necessarily in drag. Passions of the soul, whether male or female, must be clothed in the apparel of normativity; artists must speak with the voices of others—as Sand’s ungendered heart does in the guise of Gabriel, as Howe does through her dual-gendered Laurence.

As the Carnival scene in *Gabriel* spins forward, Sand progressively undermines gender fixedness in both her main characters. Astolphe—whose mistress Faustina has already observed Astolphe’s woman-like attention to his own costume—is smitten with the appearance of Gabriel in a beautiful dress,
but his reaction is not only to her appearance; it is partly also to her character. He praises him/her without at first using physical descriptors: “I have in my imagination, in my heart, an ideal woman! And it’s a woman who resembles you, Gabriel. An intelligent and simple being, forthright and refined, courageous and timid, generous and proud” (Sand 52). Gabriel, meanwhile, has had her dress made to reflect the appearance of an androgynous being she dreamed of—“not an inhabitant of this world. I had wings, and could fly high enough to traverse other worlds, toward I don’t know what ideal place” (Sand 12).

Astolphe says Gabriel dreams of angels and advises her (him, he still thinks), “Don’t wake up, because you’ll only find women in real life!” (Sand 53).

But the charged fluidity in these exchanges crashes abruptly into binary genderedness at evening’s end when Astolphe interrupts Gabriel undressing. Gabriel, unable to undo the dress’s ties and pins, in frustration rips the dress open (Sand’s stage direction in Manifold’s translation stunningly reads, “he takes his sword from the table and cuts the corset’s laces, baring his breasts” [Sand 64]), and thereafter relations between the two proceed according to the world’s expectations for an anatomical woman and anatomical man. When we next see Gabriel and Astolphe, they are a living-together couple, and she has been linguistically feminized with an “le” attached to his name.

Coupled—and predictably discontent. Gabrielle hates being left at home with servants and Astolphe’s mother, expected to make small talk and mend household linens. Priest and mother register objections to her desire to read Thucydides. Gabrielle bridles, but even in her protest she embraces a view that accepts the reality of culturally constructed distinctions between male and female:

Look, Astolphe, you made me become a woman again, but I haven’t given up altogether being a man. Even though I put on the clothes and occupations of my sex, I keep in me that instinct for moral grandeur; that calm of power that a male education develops and cultivates. It seems that I am something more than a woman. (Sand 78)

Astolphe, to his credit, is deeply sympathetic and willingly embraces “this bizarre and delicious voyage” they’ve charted (Sand 80). Gabrielle experiences what Laurence begins to discern when he lives as a woman with Berto’s sisters. Addressing his gown, the engendering mask that renders him specifically female and thus less than his whole self, Laurence fumes, “‘Toga of hypocrisy . . . what an odious imposture art thou! Thou art the ally of weakness and deformity, the cruelest enemy of beauty—thou art a very tissue of
lies’” (Howe, H 188). Like Laurence, Gabrielle from the moment she sees herself garbed as a woman wonders why women can’t be “pleasing without these simpering affectations” (Sand 50).

In Gabriel’s Act IV, a compromise has been worked out: the couple lives several months in the mountains of Calabria (Gabrielle as a woman) and then in Florence as brothers for the balance of the year. Astolphe would prefer to lengthen the Calabrian existence, Gabrielle the Florentine, but Astolphe becomes maniacally jealous when other men in Florence, believing Gabriel to be male, treat him with easy familiarity. The unexpected arrival of one of Astolphe’s former associates in their Calabrian hideaway blasts the fragile equilibrium, and Gabrielle flees. The last act presents a nightmare of pursuit and attempted coercion. Astolphe tries to persuade Gabriel’s former tutor to reveal her whereabouts and then marry them: “I feel that a little authority, legitimized by solemn vows on her part, would protect me against her independence and pride” (Sand 103). The tutor urges Astolphe to “let her live and die in disguise, happy and free, with you,” but Gabrielle recognizes that Astolphe’s putative love is really “savage pride, a thirst for vengeance and domination.” Because he’s male, she says, a life “made up only of love and contemplation could not suffice for him” (Sand 105, 120). As Astolphe’s efforts to force Gabrielle into unambiguous femaleness escalate, Gabrielle electrifyingly foresees the shipwreck of their “bizarre and delicious voyage”:

He wants to call me before a court, before an assembly of men. And there, before the judges, before the mob, have the guards tear away my doublet, and, for proof of his rights to fortune and power, unveil me for all to see the female breasts that he alone has seen palpitate! . . . But as for me, I say never! I refuse to lend myself to this final insult, and rather than suffer that affront, I will rip open my chest, mutilate my breasts to render them objects of horror to all who look on, and no man will smile at the sight of my nakedness. (Sand 122)

As Ann McCall astutely remarks (in a study of the work as reflecting Sand’s disdain for the elderly Bourbon king of France, Charles X), Gabrielle’s “secret and essential illegality remains her body.” Her death in the final scene, in McCall’s reading, illustrates “how systematic rejection and destruction of the feminine allow for the peaceful transition of power between males who bond over her dead body” (McCall 44, 47). It might be said further to signify the death of Sand’s personal dream of a non-hegemonic relationship. The work surely reflects, as so many of Sand’s novels in the 1830s do (and in particular the work just preceding Gabriel, Les Sept Cordes de la Lyre), her own despair
in trying to construct alliances with the men in her life that would afford her the same degree of freedom they enjoyed.\textsuperscript{8}

Sand's Gabriel is the nearest thing to a hermaphrodite that conventional biology allows. Her construction as a male, although the intention behind it is to cement her into a social role that will preserve property at the expense of her selfhood, instead provides her with a sense of ungendered normativity of the kind described by Peggy McIntosh as bestowing on the subject an “invisible knapsack” of privileges. “I don't feel that my soul is one sex or the other,” s/he says: “I don't feel in myself any absolute power for anything” (Sand 10). Yet once she learns what she anatomically is, she feels that her female body liberates her from the desire to dominate and gives her the will to live generously, companionably, lovingly, on equal ground with her beloved (and nearly redeemed) Astolphe. Although these two attitudes reflect competing ideas about the origins of gender-associated behavior, their embodiment in Gabriel/le envisions a mode of existence potentially unencumbered by the drag of gender.\textsuperscript{9} The world, however, will not allow it. Astolphe's maleness, anatomical and constructed, will not allow it. Only death permits Gabriel to become the being of her dream: “free . . . the dream . . . flying,” she murmurs as she dies at the hand of a hired assassin (Sand 126).

It is the grandfather who hires the assassin, and in Ann McCall's reading his gestures inscribe “a blueprint for postrevolutionary [French] society where dynastic, family and gender politics converge in a terrifying depiction of abjection” (McCall 39). The grandfather's goal throughout is to prevent Gabriel from rendering her inheritance into the branch of the family represented by Astolphe, the son of the younger brother. But Sand's ending is subjective as well; it contains her understanding that Gabriel/le's hermaphroditic existence will inevitably fall victim to the relentless monolith of Astolphe's maleness. Sand brings Astolphe explicitly to an understanding, in the last scene, that it is he, Astolphe, who has really killed Gabriel.

\textsc{Howe}'s hermaphrodite Laurence, we might speculate, provides a site for considering ungendered or dual-gendered existence not as a dream beyond death, but as an embodied possibility. What if the hermaphrodisism were actual, not metaphorical? Howe might be thought to wonder. Given that a being must inevitably be gender-\textit{constructed} through nurture and education, what if that being were at least free of a gendered \textit{anatomy}? Howe's trope, like Sand's, opens room for consideration of whether gender is in fact immutable (an extremely rare phenomenon in 1840s American culture; much rarer than in France, where fascination with the ambiguously gendered creature
was widespread\(^{10}\). But Howe’s own conflicted attitudes on the subject appear to have generated a plot no less melancholy in its implications than Sand’s narrative.

Being raised male seems to give Laurence an inescapably male mind, despite his ambiguous body; he exhibits little of the fluidity, the genuinely double personality that is Gabriel’s defining characteristic, and certainly little pleasure in his state. In speaking of his early interactions with men and women, Laurence notes that a simple ungendered soul, “not invested with the capacity of either entire possession or entire surrender, has but a lame and unsatisfactory part to play in this world” (Howe, \(H\) 5). To be gendered, he clearly believes, is to be enabled to live fully, and though his early years, in retrospect, look pleasant enough, he also remembers them as “interrupted by deepest melancholy” and threaded with “hope for something far better and brighter”—a state of existence for which, he notes, he is “waiting still” (Howe, \(H\) 6). Further,

> The struggle from childhood to comparative maturity had had for me its secret agonies, its hours of depression and desolation—of these, I do not speak—I have never revealed them—I have never willingly laid upon another the lightest portion of the burthen which it was given to me to bear through life. (Howe, \(H\) 6)

The point scarcely needs detailing: in all of Laurence’s interactions and speculations, not once does he find liberation in his hermaphroditic identity. The reverse is true; he is at relative ease only when securely fixed within a gendered persona, as when he exhibits his maleness to Ronald by throwing big rocks or when hiding from discovery by his father’s minions by becoming “Cecilia” in the household of Berto’s sisters. It is never clear whether Berto knows all along of Laurence’s anomalous body, but in the opening sections of the narrative’s second part, the two of them behave entirely as two young gentlemen of their age, culture, and historical moment would plausibly behave, and these are the pages in which Laurence is most relaxed, least troubled by anxiety about being a “beautiful monster” (Howe, \(H\) 193).\(^{11}\)

Several early readers of *The Hermaphrodite* have remarked on passages with a misogynistic cast.\(^{12}\) Berto is regularly the mouthpiece for such sentiments. His attitudes are displayed early in Part II as he discusses his intention to educate Laurence through “the discipline of society”—a pedagogy he will employ with the supposedly male Laurence but would never try with a female. “[T]hey [women] are educated rather to triviality and routine than to strength and virtue—they are taught to appeal to our indulgence, not to
command our esteem,” he says, which might be taken as an indication that he believes women’s putative failings to be a product of alterable nurture if he didn’t continue by assigning essentialist qualities to explain why women so readily embrace the trivial:

“All things run easily to extremes, in their excitable natures, and as one sees their piety become superstition, and their learning, pedantry, so in society their love of approbation becomes outrageous vanity, and their coquetry something for which I can scarce find a name which would be at once true and decent.” (Howe, H 99)

His attempts to dissuade the Swiss girl Eleonora from embracing the Church seem to have cemented his disdain for women: “Who ever by reason convinced a woman, much less a girl? Born to feel, and not taught to think, they are ever the slaves of their own impulses, until they become the slaves of men, nor do they give up one caprice, until it is trampled underfoot by its successor” (Howe, H 101). Near the end, debating with his sister Briseida and the doctor treating Laurence about whether the male or the female predominates in Laurence, Berto again disparages women, this time on the basis of their allegedly shaky sense of duty. The “best” women, in his opinion, are in fact capable of arriving at a reasonable idea of duty, but once arrived, their application is dubious: “The thing which they are most especially fond of doing, be it never so mischievous, is always their duty” (Howe, H 194).

Laurence sometimes seems to share Berto’s opinions. He is given the narrative’s most extensive (and offensive) anti-female rant in the passage in which he muses on women’s desire occasionally to “throw off their chains with their petticoats,” assume male attire, and move freely in the world:

And this masculine mania may last long, and go far, but it will not last forever. However strong, or depraved, or metaphysical the emancipated woman may be, she will in the end feel the want of some one to bully and protect her, the necessity of being cherished and admired, or kicked and cuffed. And so some day she will ignominiously strike her flag of defiance, and creep back to her woman’s trappings, and to her woman’s life as best she may, happy after all her wanderings if she can find some kind brute to play the Beast to her Beauty, someone who though he may outrage her best feelings, laugh at her convictions, and offend her taste, will yet praise her eyebrows, and pay her bills. (Howe, H 131)

So insistently masculine is this passage (and its larger context) that it tends to distort Laurence’s characterization in light of what he says about himself.
at the narrative’s beginning. There, we are told that he was raised male so as to be able to choose his own terms in associating with the world and “haply learn to seem that which [he] could never be” (Howe, H 3). Evidently he learned the terms well; even Gabriel’s rigorous programming (“the grandeur of the masculine role, the abject condition of the feminine role in nature and society” [Sand 7]) does not lead h/her to anything like this condescension.

Like Berto, Laurence is an older sibling to sisters, and in his brief account of them he reflects something of Berto’s cynicism: when he meets them as adults, they are “changed past all remembrance, the world, matrimony and maternity having had full sway over them” (Howe, H 24). One has married for money, the other for love, and neither evokes any emotion in him; they appear to represent object lessons in female abjection. But if Laurence shares Berto’s misogyny to a degree, Howe offers several additional shades in Laurence’s character, arising in part from his relationship with Emma von P. and in part from his close-quarters experience living with Berto’s sisters.

Laurence’s apparent freedom from the sensation of sexual desire enables a view of Emma that reflects something of Berto’s justice. She is beautiful, and more than that—witty, tactful, self-possessed. She is something of a queen bee, expecting homage, but that possibly negative attribute only renders her more charming to Laurence, who is the object of her conquest. “I was her chosen knight, and never have I been promoted to more gentle service” (Howe, H 8), he preens, delighted by her comprehensive loveliness until she seriously falls in love with him, but even then able to take accurate measure of the “hidden strength of her nature” (Howe, H 12). He is, of course, devastated by her death and by his role in it, yet that loss, as he notes, permits her to grow into “an object of mystic reverence and wonder, devoutly shrined in my inmost soul—revered and worshipped, perhaps, all the more for being no longer seen, for never having been possessed” (Howe, H 43). Although Laurence has earlier lamented his own inability either to surrender to another or to possess another, here he seems to understand that existence prior to that moment of engenderedness through sex has a quality that is lost once humans are jailed in their biological identities—and that women stand to lose the most. Gabriel/le after her capture by Astolphe is a case in point.

Berto, it is true, does appear to see his sisters as somewhat removed from the ordinary condition of women and therefore more admirable than others; the older two are “enlightened . . . expansive . . . intelligent . . . genial,” while the youngest, Nina, is “more womanly than her sisters” in being dependent on another’s affection to secure her own happiness (Howe, H 136–37). Sharing their apartments enables Laurence to develop a more nuanced view of them; Berto, he notes, is “not quite at the bottom of their secrets” (Howe, H 150). They body forth in the novel as individuals, not as generic repre-
sentations of Woman and certainly not as dismissable coquettes maimed by “excitable natures” (Howe, H 99). Briseida, in particular, arouses Laurence’s admiration for the pragmatism with which she embraces the realities of her relationship with Pepino. Laurence praises her for relinquishing any kind of battle for Pepino’s affections and suggests that while her attitudes may be self-defeating, they are at least not “worldly and designing” (Howe, H 152). It is her character that prompts Laurence’s comparison of women to vines ripening near volcanoes (Howe, H 154–55). Determining to keep her choices unknown to Berto, he concludes that there is “nothing paltry, or trivial, or ungenerous in her composition” (Howe, H 155).

Berto’s object in arranging for Laurence to live as a woman is allegedly so that he can “see men as women see them” and also “see women as they appear to each other, divested of the moral corset de précaution in which they always shew themselves to men” (Howe, H 133). Because Berto also needs to conceal Laurence from his dangerous father, this education-rationale is cast somewhat in doubt, and in truth, aside from certain mores regarding Roman love and marriage, Laurence’s sojourn doesn’t seem to teach him much. His women’s clothes are simply a disguise, never an identity, and his donning of and extrication from them is played for its humor (although they cause him “uneasiness” [Howe, H 136] at first, since they evoke the disturbing evening when he portrayed Juliet in Ronald’s presence). When Gabrielle must put on women’s clothes and embrace female existence, the restrictions give rise to sympathy for the narrowness of her mother-in-law’s life, and by extension that of all women: “I see that the best of men can neither fully love nor completely esteem women. My tutors were right to carefully teach me that the female sex plays the most abject and unhappy role on this earth!” (Sand 79). H/her perceptions are informed and empathetically enlarged by her experience; Laurence’s, on the other hand, are part of the accumulation of knowledge that, the following month, will move to encompass natural history. As he disrobes on the first night in Berto’s sisters’ dwelling, he diverts himself from the tedium of loosening his corset by “repeating . . . the tenses of a Hebrew verb” (Howe, H 147). When the experiment comes to an end, the climactic note is Berto’s pleasure in the success of the deception and satisfaction with Laurence’s “investigations” of his youngest sister’s “symptoms” (Howe, H 187). Laurence’s apostrophe to his gown as a “toga of hypocrisy” and “the cruelest enemy of beauty” doesn’t register as a critique of gender imprisonment; he’s just relieved to resume his male identity.

Of the text’s women, Nina absorbs Laurence’s attention most fully. Why is she his favorite? Berto describes her as “not so clever or so ambitious” as her sisters (Howe, H 137), but, unlike them, defined by her capacity for love.
Laurence's first impression that she is “bloodless” and “icy” gives way quickly when the thought of her lover Gaetano makes her smile. In a paragraph-long reflection on how smiles reveal souls, Laurence contrasts Nina's smile with the ordinary variety: “Nina's smile was more like an electric gleam of delight which the same soul, enfanchised and soaring free, might in passing cast upon its human prison” (Howe, H 141). Enfranchised and soaring free: although essentially a “prisoner of hope” (as she is later described [Howe, H 183]), Nina appears to Laurence as the only entirely liberated being he knows, liberated precisely by her bondage in love. Identified emphatically by Berto as “the woman,” she merits the term (in Laurence's view) because she is “wife and mother” though also still “maiden bud” (Howe, H 142)—a being defined by her relationship to the male, rendered susceptible to illness and madness only because she is a Rachel weeping for children she has not yet had. Laurence's (and the text's) greatest enthusiasm is for the highly conventional master–servant relationships represented by Gaetano/Nina, and even more insistently by Rafael/Eva in the manuscript of Berto's uncle. A strange thing, finally—that this astonishingly transgressive text should so avidly embrace the very binary it interrogates.

WRITING in 1861 about the period in Sand's life just after her grandmother died (Sand was 17), Howe characterized it as a perfect blend of childhood insouciance and awareness of the value of that insouciance, a moment of suspension before the “terrible” demands and interests of life overtook her. Howe paused to consider this state of being:

Would that this ideal period could be prolonged for women!–but the exigencies of the race, or perhaps the fears of society, do not permit it. The two-faced spectre of marriage awaits her, for good or ill. The aphelion of a woman's liberty is soon reached, the dark organic forces bind her to tread the narrow orbit of her sex, and if, at the farthest bound of her individual progress, the attraction could fail, and let her slip from the eternal circle, chaos would be the result. (Howe, “Sand” 528)

The ambivalence in this passage, as in The Hermaphrodite, is pronounced. Yes, she acknowledges, chaos would erupt if woman stopped being woman. But the forces that keep her in orbit are “dark”; the orbit is “narrow”; its outer edge is “soon reached”; marriage is a “two-faced spectre”; its positive issue is far from clear. Later, reflecting on Sand's adoption of male clothes in Paris, Howe notes that when Sand's daughter Solange came to live with her, “you
put on your weeds of weakness again;—your little daughter made you once more a woman!” (Howe, “Sand” 531). Is Howe glad to be able to report this? Distressed? “Rather both than neither” (Howe, H 195)? Near the end of the essay she allows that “[t]he world knows that the life before us is no example for women to follow,” though is quick to insist, despite this, that “she who led it was on the whole an earnest and sincere person, of ardent imagination and large heart, loving the good as well as the beautiful, even if often mistaken in both,—and above all, honest in her errors and their acknowledgment” (Howe, “Sand” 533). Yet the essay’s final word is very much like the Laurence narrative’s final word: “If there be a divine of passion for which it is noble to suffer and sacrifice, there is also a deeper divine of duty, far transcending the other both in sacrifice and in reward” (Howe, “Sand” 533). This sentiment underscores Valarie Ziegler’s suggestion that Eva and Rafael’s transfiguration into a single being emblemizes a “true” hermaphroditism born from “transformative spirituality,” possibly more radical and disruptive of nineteenth-century gender prescriptions than the blighted, monster-like figure of Laurence (Ziegler 70).

The narrative probably encodes, among other autobiographical notes, Howe’s decision to embrace the inevitability of this unequal power distribution in her own marriage. Both practicality and her ethical sensibility compelled such a resolution in the 1840s. Aside from the Eva/Rafael story, the text contains other suggestions regarding Howe’s resignation to her circumstances. A poem at the head of chapter 7 encapsulates Howe’s determination to live in the world that existed for her:

\[
\text{Come, earnest labour, earnest thought,} \\
\text{Life must fulfill, and not destroy;} \\
\text{A noble sorrow, nobly borne} \\
\text{Is better than a vulgar joy. (Howe, H 34)}
\]

Perhaps most poignant is what we learn of Ronald’s thesis. He is reluctant to show it to Laurence, sure that he won’t like it, knowing it is not at all what Laurence supposes, and finally delivers it with extreme reluctance. The story—of a pilgrim who worships the marble image of a saint, “impiously” praying that it will come to life and therefore dying just as his wish is granted (Howe, H 75)—might be taken as an expression of Howe’s fears regarding her own “thesis.” Suppose life could proceed on terms hermaphroditic—freed from gender assignment, freed from the hierarchy attendant on gender—what then? What if that particular “saint” could come to life? Laurence leaves no doubt:
“[W]hen we seek to wring the impossible from Heaven, we pray for our own destruction. The order of our lives, like the order of the universe, is good and beautiful, and the intervention of a miracle in the one might be as dangerous and destructive as the admission of some lawless comet in the other.” (Howe, H 75)

Howe’s headnote for her article on George Sand underlines the differences between herself and her subject. It is a reference to Cleopatra from Horace’s Ode I.37: *deduci superbo / non humilis mulier triumpho* (“Not for her the enemy ship, the crownless voyage, her role in the grand parade of Triumph: she was no weak-kneed woman.”). Horace, as Howe notes, celebrates Cleopatra’s heroic end, even while exulting in her overthrow. Sand, for Howe, is “another woman of royal soul,” deservedly illustrious, but finally a woman of sin, the associate of Sappho and “the Magdalen” (Howe, “Sand” 534), needing forgiveness. Sand’s *Gabriel*, if it was a touchstone for Howe, would have struck her as tragic but true: Gabriel/le dies willingly, realizing that loss of the soul’s freedom, the triumph of *either/or* over both/and, can lead only to madness. S/he blesses h/er murderer for having “carried out heaven’s will” (Sand 124–25). Any other ending would have been unthinkable.

And yet it was not quite unthinkable, and the testament to that fact is the existence of *The Hermaphrodite*. Whether these writers’ historical moment could have permitted another outcome for these imaginaries is beside the point. Both works evidence the reality that women were working to embody the possibilities within the imaginary. Rafael thanks God that Eva’s love for him was “single” (Howe, H 180), since otherwise she’d have lost him. We, on the other hand, can be grateful for Howe’s (and Sand’s) double vision.

Notes

1. Masson includes a reliable list of references to Sand in American books, newspapers, and periodicals between 1837 and 1876, as well as brief accounts of the histories and political slants of the periodicals. The vicissitudes and nuances of early Anglo-American reaction to Sand’s fiction are a study unto themselves, as are those of the twentieth-century scholarly work on this topic.

2. See also Child, *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817–1880*, and Karcher, “Margaret Fuller and Lydia Maria Child.” In 1858 Child wrote to Lucy and Mary Osgood, “I have always known that George Sand was my twin sister. . . . [T]he grain of the wood is certainly the same in both of us. This consciousness of her being my double has given her works an irresistible fascination for me. They often provoke me; sometimes shock me; but I am constrained to acknowledge, ‘Thus in all probability, should I have written, had I
been brought up in France: 'I never read a book of hers without continually stumbling on things that seem to have been written by myself’ (Child 315–16). Dall’s interest in Sand began in 1845; she translated *Spiridion* in 1854–55 and published a portion of it in *The Una*, July–October 1855.

3. Ward’s *New York Review* essays are examined in Stafford. On the Longfellow–Ward friendship, see Thomas, especially pp. 93–95 on the disagreement between Ward and his father over the worth of *Hyperion* and Longfellow himself. Excerpts of Ward’s letters appear in Elliott; however, her transcriptions are extremely free and idiosyncratically edited. The letter and journal manuscripts from which I quote are among the Longfellow Papers at Harvard’s Houghton Library. Even in their sanitized form, the essays on Romance and Longfellow came under attack by Park Benjamin, editor of *The New Yorker*, as “unworthy of the *New York Review*” (quoted in Elliott 250).

4. The work appeared in the July 1, July 15, and August 1, 1839, issues of the *Revue*. According to Gay Manifold, whose translation provides the text for this study, the work also was published in a number of book editions beginning in 1840; see Sand xix. Sand evidently wrote the work quickly, in an effort to generate some much-needed revenue from the *Revue*’s editor François Buloz, to whom she had been under contract since 1832. Buloz, dissatisfied with the works Sand had been producing since having come under the sway of Pierre Leroux’s Christian messianism, was looking for something lighter, racier—something more like her sensational early novels *Indiana* and *Jacques*.

5. Bowen’s was the first substantial essay on Sand by an American. For more on Bowen and this essay, see Rabinovitz. Bowen discusses *Gabriel*, calling the plot “a fine field . . . for the development of the writer’s opinions respecting the injustice done to woman, and the false position, which is assigned to her by the verdict of society,” but providing only a truncated and distorted account of the play’s central issues (Bowen 132–34).

6. In Act V, during a later Carnival season in Rome, Gabriel wears a domino costume.

7. Compare Ronald’s dream of Laurence: “I saw you robed in white, crowned with flowers, and half veiled by the floating tresses of your bright hair. You were transfigured in a light which seemed to emanate from yourself, and all your motions were accompanied by a faint music” (Howe, *H* 74).

8. The issue of the play’s argument regarding the appropriate roles of women and men is somewhat more complicated than this brief account suggests. Gay Manifold’s introduction proposes ideological affinities between Sand’s incomplete (and never translated) *Lettres à Marcie* (1837) and *Gabriel*, a connection that accrues plausibility in light of two later studies of *Lettres*: Naomi Schor’s “Feminism and George Sand: *Lettres à Marcie*” (1992) and Catherine M. Peebles’s *The Psyche of Feminism* (2004).

9. See Schor’s perception that “Sand is exemplarily feminist . . . because of her contradictions, and not despite them . . . In all feminism in the broadest sense of the term there would then be equal parts of conservative and contestatory forces” (Schor 46).

10. The classic treatment of this topic is Busst, “The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century” (1967).

11. One might argue that the figure exhibiting the more plausible hermaphroditic characteristics in this narrative is Ronald. Howe’s paragraph introducing him refuses to allow determination of his gender: he is “one whose sex disclosed itself in a form of perfect beauty” (Howe, *H* 50). Ronald manifests conventional female behavior in taking care of Laurence when he finds him in the forest retreat. Later, during his university days
and especially during the Romeo and Juliet scenes, although Ronald ostensibly believes Laurence is female, Howe lets ambiguity surround the nature of their mutual affection. See Bethany Schneider’s enlightening discussion of chapters 15 and 16 elsewhere in this volume. At the very end, Ronald seems to have been queered by his love for Laurence: his life has taken on emotional proportions remarkably like Laurence’s, and he has had to settle into a blighted existence as inheritor of his father’s estates. Life is much like it was in his adolescent state before he met Laurence. Note Howe’s language in this summary sentence: “Nothing has changed, except the gay boy who once sang, and shouted, and frolicked among woods and waters the livelong day—the country people say that an evil fairy came and stole him away in his boyhood, and sent back to them only this miserable substitute” (Howe, H 192).

12. I offer gratitude to the members of the Nineteenth Century American Women Writers Study Group, who devoted their spring 2005 meeting at Amherst College to consideration of The Hermaphrodite. My essay has taken shape in the context of the writing that has grown out of that meeting and is indebted to many of the scholars whose work appears in this volume.

13. Ziegler emphasizes the fact that, as the Laurence manuscript fragments were deposited in Houghton Library, the Eva–Rafael piece was first in the folder. She reads this parable as a central motif for the entire narrative—“the theme of unwavering devotion rewarded, after much suffering, by ecstatic union” (Ziegler 64)—and interprets its prominence as Howe’s acknowledgment that “there was something unnatural, even perverse, about her desire to achieve autonomy and exercise her voice independent of [her husband’s]” (Ziegler 69).

14. The comet image recalls Howe’s poem “The Heart’s Astronomy,” in which she compares her nightly walks around the house to the orbit of a comet and touchingly portrays her children watching from the window, afraid that she may not return. The poem ends by advising her children not to count firmly on that return: “when ye know / What wild erratic natures are, / Pray that the laws of heavenly force / Would help and guide the Mother star” (Howe, PF 100–102).