



The Hermaphrodite (Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers)

Julia Ward Howe

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Written in the 1840s and published here for the first time, Julia Ward Howe's novel about a hermaphrodite is unlike anything of its time—or, in truth, of our own. Narrated by Laurence, who is raised and lives as a man and is loved by men and women alike, yet can respond to neither, this unconventional story explores the realization “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.” Laurence describes his repudiation by his family, his involvement with an attractive widow, his subsequent wanderings and eventual attachment to a sixteen-year-old boy, his own tutelage by a Roman nobleman and his sisters, and his ultimate reunion with his early love. His is a story unique in nineteenth-century American letters, at once a remarkable reflection of a largely hidden inner life and a richly imagined tale of coming-of-age at odds with one's culture.

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