



# **Théophile Gautier's "Mademoiselle de Maupin": Toward a Definition of the "Androgynous Discourse"**

*Marlène Barsoum*

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Théophile Gautier explores language in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*; therein lies his modernity. He is seeking a language that can express a truth that is not partial and therefore embeds in the novel the mythic figure of the androgyne to evoke a theory of perfect expression, or «the androgynous discourse». Gautier has this recalcitrant referent hovering in the interstices of repetitions and the interplay of signs to demonstrate that the androgyne is non-demonstrable but that it exists as an idea and that the text of the androgyne is a narrative on the irremediable limitations of language.

Gautier's concern in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, however, is not limited to the expression of the writer's inevitable frustration when confronted with the unrepresentable. He also gives voice to a longing which is larger in scope, namely, the wish for completeness in oneself. The myth of the androgyne, evoked in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, serves to point to the universal story of the human striving for wholeness.

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