

HOMOSEXUAL: MALE-MALE

Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (extract)

Initially commissioned as a historically-inspired romance based on the life of the seventeenth-century opera star Mademoiselle Maupin (also known as La Maupin), an expert swordswoman who often dressed as a man, Théophile Gautier's 1835 novel questions presumptions of heterosexuality in its exploration of two protagonists' awakening to desire. The plot centres on a love triangle between the Chevalier d'Albert, a young dandy searching for the ideal woman, his mistress Rosette, and Théodore de Sérannes, with whom Rosette is in love. To his horror, d'Albert realises that Théodore embodies everything he desires in a lover and despairs at the fact that he has fallen for a man, as we see in this extract. The reader learns that Théodore has rejected Rosette due to an apparently insurmountable obstacle; we eventually find out that Théodore is, in fact, a woman in disguise. The mystery woman reveals herself to d'Albert by spending half the night with him before spending the other half with Rosette. By dawn she has disappeared, leaving only a letter behind.

[trans. N/A]

Ce qu'il y a de singulier, c'est que je ne pense presque plus à son sexe et que je l'aime avec une sécurité parfaite. Quelquefois je cherche à me persuader que cet amour est abominable, et je me le dis à moi-même le plus sévèrement possible ; mais cela ne vient que des lèvres, c'est un raisonnement que je me fais et que je ne sens pas : il me semble réellement que c'est la chose la plus simple du monde et que tout autre à ma place en ferait autant.

Je le vois, je l'écoute parler ou chanter, car il chante admirablement, et j'y prends un indicible plaisir. – Il me fait tellement l'effet d'une femme qu'un jour, dans la chaleur de la conversation, il m'est échappé de l'appeler madame...

The strange part of it all is that I hardly think of his sex now, and that I love him with a sense of perfect security. Sometimes I try to persuade myself that this love is an abomination, and I tell myself so in the harshest possible way; but it comes only from the lips, it is an argument that I urge upon myself and fail to appreciate; it really seems to me that it is the simplest thing in the world and that any other in my place would do the same.

I look at him, I listen to him talk or sing – for he sings admirably – and I take an indescribable pleasure in it. – He seems to me so much like a woman that one day, in the heat of conversation, I called him madame inadvertently...