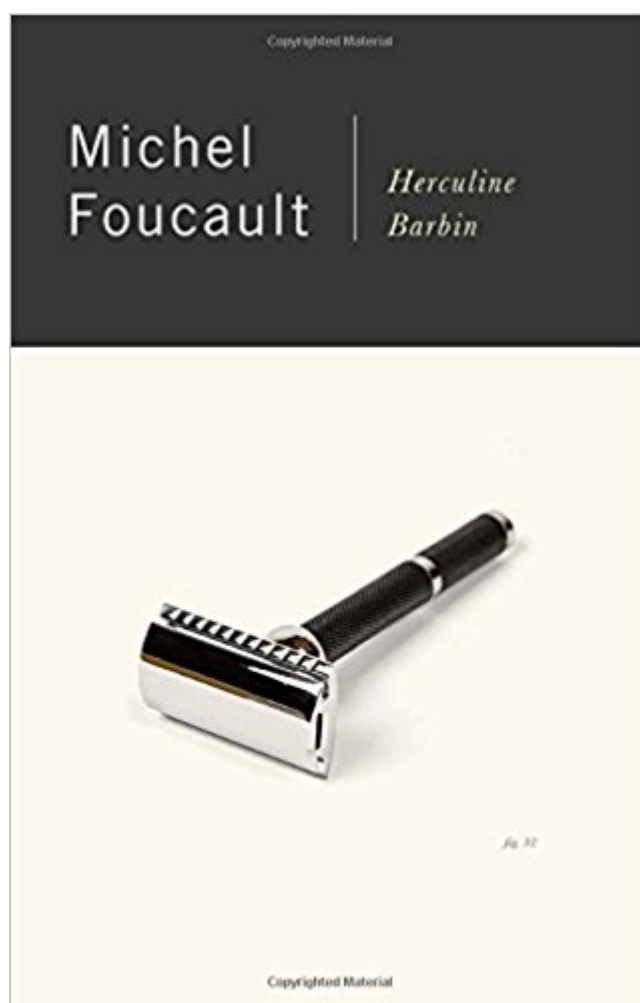


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Herculine Barbin (Being The Recently Discovered Memoirs Of A Nineteenth Century French Hermaphrodite)



Synopsis

With an eye for the sensual bloom of young schoolgirls, and the torrid style of the romantic novels of her day, Herculine Barbin tells the story of her life as a hermaphrodite. Herculine was designated female at birth. A pious girl in a Catholic orphanage, a bewildered adolescent enchanted by the ripening bodies of her classmates, a passionate lover of another schoolmistress, she is suddenly reclassified as a man. Alone and desolate, he commits suicide at the age of thirty in a miserable attic in Paris. Here, in an erotic diary, is one lost voice from our sexual past. Provocative, articulate, eerily prescient as she imagines her corpse under the probing instruments of scientists, Herculine brings a disturbing perspective to our own notions of sexuality. Michel Foucault, who discovered these memoirs in the archives of the French Department of Public Hygiene, presents them with the graphic medical descriptions of Herculine's body before and after her death. In a striking contrast, a painfully confused young person and the doctors who examine her try to sort out the nature of masculine and feminine at the dawn of the age of modern sexuality.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Herculine Barbin can be savored like a libertine novel. The ingenuousness of Herculine, the passionate yet equivocal tenderness which thrusts her into the arms, even into the beds, of her companions, gives these pages a charm strangely erotic...Michel Foucault has a genius for bringing to light texts and reviving destinies outside the ordinary." *Le Monde*, July 1978

Text: English, French (translation) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I recommend this wholeheartedly for understanding intersexuality or just if you love tragic romance. Foucault's commentary is helpful and enjoyable. Herculine is such a fabulous storyteller and her story is so heartbreakingly tragic but it grounds the concept of intersexuality into reality rather than most lore written about hermaphrodites which, as Foucault said, reduces intersexuality to myth. It is interesting to compare Herculine's memoirs to the story about the "scandal at the convent". Sadly the later is divergent from truth in rather sexist and misleading ways. For instance, the author rewrites Herculine as being far more stereotypically masculine than she was and writes her lover as far more stereotypically feminine than her memoirs describe Sara. The masculine stereotype is devilishly unappealing looks with a vast intellect and the feminine stereotype is physical perfection and emptiheadedness. It is in some ways an enjoyably dynamic contrast, but cliché, though I'm sure some would think it more romantic that way. Some of the medical journals seemed a bit Freudian and Foucault talks about the misogynistic history of such literature, but they were interesting.

A very moving account. Foucault simply frames it, but it is a lovely and sad book.

A fascinating read! I went through it in two flights.

This was very well written by Ms Barbin herself. With every line I could feel her/his confusion and pain. Anyone interested in this topic should read this book.

Wonderful but sad story.

Just a bit of bio. from the 19th century. Seems that nothing has changed now.

It is really precious to read this person's story - well worth it. Too bad there is a blurb somewhere saying that it is a steamy tale - no - it is very well told with no more details than necessary.

one of the most honest things you can read

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