

Seraphita is indisputably the most attractive of Balzac's fantastic novels. Not because of the Swedenborgian theories it is full of, but because Balzac manages to give an unprecedented sparkle to a fundamental theme of archaic anthropology : the androgyn considered as the typical image of the perfect man.

Let us remember the novel's set and topic. In a castle by the village of Jarvis, near the Stromfjord fjord, lived a strange being of mobile and melancholic beauty. As do some others of Balzac's characters, he seems to hide a terrible "secret", an impenetrable "mystery". But this time, it is no longer a "secret" like was Vautrin's. The character of Seraphita is not a man tormented by his own fate and in conflict with society. It is a being different in quality from the rest of mankind, and his "mystery" do not relate to some dark episodes of his past life, but does relate to the very structure of his own existence ; for the mysterious character loves Minna, and is loved back by her. She sees him as a man, Seraphitus ; he is also loved by Wilfred, to whom he is a woman, Seraphita.

This perfect androgyn was born from parents who were Swedenborg's disciples. Although he never left his fjord, never opened a book, never spoke with any professor and practiced no art, Seraphitus-Seraphita proves to have an outstanding erudition, and his mental abilities were beyond those of other mortals. Balzac describes with a pathetic naiveté this androgyn's qualities, his lonely life, his extatic contemplations. All this, obviously, based on Swedenborg's doctrines, for the whole novel is mostly written to illustrate and comment the swedenborgian theories on the perfect Man.

But Balzac's androgyn have very little to do with an earthly life. His spiritual life is entirely directed to the skies. Seraphitus-Seraphita lives solely to purify itself - and to *love*. Although Balzac do not clearly write it, one understands that Seraphitus-Seraphita cannot leave Earth before experiencing love. It might be the last and most sublime perfection : *to love truly, and altogether*, two beings of opposite genders. Platonic love for sure, but not an abstract, general love. Balzac's androgyn loves two beings well individualized ; he remains, as such, rooted in concrete life. He is not, here on Earth, an angel ; he is a perfect man, that is, a *complete being*.