



Rachilde and French Women's Authorship: From Decadence to Modernism

Melanie C. Hawthorne

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Under the assumed name Rachilde, Marguerite Eymery (1860–1953) wrote over sixty works of fiction, drama, poetry, memoir, and criticism, including *Monsieur Vénus*, one of the most famous examples of decadent fiction. She was closely associated with the literary journal *Mercur de France*, inspired parts of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and mingled with all the literary lights of the day. Yet for all that, very little has been written about her. Melanie C. Hawthorne corrects this oversight and counters the traditional approach to Rachilde by persuasively portraying this "eccentric" as patently representative of the French women writers of her time and of the social and literary issues they faced. Seen in this light, Rachilde's writing clearly illustrates important questions in feminist literary theory as well as significant features of turn-of-the-century French society.

Hawthorne arranges her approach to Rachilde around several defining events in the author's life, including the controversial publication of *Monsieur Vénus*, with its presentation of sex reversals. Weaving back and forth in time, she is able to depict these moments in relation to Rachilde's life, work, and times and to illuminate nineteenth-century publishing practices and rivalries, including authorial manipulations of the market for sexually suggestive literature. The most complete and accurate account yet written of this emblematic author, Hawthorne's work is also the first to situate Rachilde in the broader social contexts and literary currents of her time and of our own.

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