

# Analysis of Hermaphroditism in Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*

Amuthavalli S

School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Chennai, India

Saradha Rajkumar

School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Chennai, India

**Abstract**—*Middlesex*, written by Jeffrey Eugenides, gives a memorable voice to one of those "coherent" gender beings. As Judith Butler mentions in one of her works, "*If sex and gender are radically distinct, then it does not follow that to be a given sex is to become a given gender; in other words, "woman" need not be the cultural construction of the female body, and "man" need not interpret male bodies*" (Butler 1999, 142). In short, this paper brings the chronological and biological defects that haunted Cal/Lie's growth as a whole person as opposed to the person she/he wanted to be. Adding to that, the novel deals with wide themes and narrative structures. Much research has focused on ethnography, cultural identity, and immigrant life in search of a home and all. This paper focused on the hermaphroditism of the main protagonist from the novel, who narrates the entire generational epic concluding with hers.

**Index Terms**—Hermaphroditism, gender crisis, gender studies, psychosocial analysis and psychological analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Jeffrey Eugenides is a prolific writer who has made a name for himself by writing novels that deal with current issues. His works speak volumes about his extensive knowledge of the subject matter on which he publishes. One of his most critically acclaimed works was "*Middlesex*". This novel deals with the three-generational epic storyline of a family who migrated from Turkey to settle in America. *Middlesex* depicts the harsh reality of the American Dream. Jeffrey Eugenides claims that his grandparents' migration storey helped him a lot in developing the storyline and the characters. To be precise, *Middlesex* is a storyline of migration and the ethnicity of the characters. *Middlesex* comes from the family saga of a postmodern society. Jeffrey Eugenides is known for resurrecting Greek mythologies that he was exposed to as a child in Detroit. Mostly, he is known for bringing out his novels in a hidden autobiographical format. His other noble works are *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), *The Marriage Plot* (2011), a finalist for The Nationalist Book Critic Circle Award for Fiction, 2011.

In an interview regarding *Middlesex*, Eugenides remarks: "Since it's about genetics, I thought the book should be a novelistic genome; that is, it should contain some of the oldest traits of writing and storytelling" (Dave, 2002). So the plotline deals with the modern concept of genetic disorder while using classical concepts of storytelling. In earlier days, the concept of hermaphroditism was considered a much fantasised subject, as we read in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is also a science and myth-related concept.

Hermaphroditus is the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, the messenger and Herald of the Gods at Mt. Olympus, and Venus, the goddess of love who was born in the guise of a sea creature, according to Greek mythology. At some point, around the time Hermaphroditus was 15 years old, he rejected the love of Salmacis. She prayed to God to keep her forever united with him. As a result, she was united with Hermaphroditus as half female and half male. That's how the storyline of hermaphroditism evolved. In general, hermaphroditism is a condition in which an individual who was born with both female and male reproductive organs has an "intersex" person is someone who was born with female genitals but mostly male anatomy on the inside. They do have both XY and XX chromosome pairs, i.e., both ovaries and testicles. In the end, nature doesn't decide who is born with regular genitals or who is born with irregular genitals with terms. Humans are the ones who decide what is "normal" and what is not. People in Western countries, on the other hand, are emerging to bring it to a common phase, and they accept themselves and their chromosomes as they are. Even so, in the third world and other developing countries, they are sought after and treated differently.

Cal Stephanides begins *Middlesex* by quoting "history's most renowned hermaphrodite" (Eugenides, 3), relating the storey of her and her forebears. Because of the war that caused the Smyrna fire, her or his grandparents, Lefty and Desdemona, migrated from Turkey to America. After arriving in America, they stayed with their relatives, Sourmelina and Jimmy Zizmo. They smuggled liquor and wove silk for the Muslim nation in order to earn money and survive. They remembered the Great Depression as a glorious era. Lefty and Desdemona were siblings who married and had two children as an incest couple. One of their children, Milton, is in love with his cousin, Tessie (Sourmelina's daughter). He fought in World War II before marrying. After a tumultuous marriage between Tessie and the priest, she eventually

married Milton. They had two children, Chapter Eleven and Cal/Lie, the novel's protagonist who was born as a hermaphrodite. She is unaware of her condition until she reaches adolescence.

From the artwork and posters, s/he understands and realises that she is different from the norm. She talked about her sexuality with her brother and an unknown buddy titled "Obscure Object." She was caught during her intercourse by Obscure's brother, so she fled the scene and was injured by a tractor, which sent her to the hospital. She was found to have an uncommon kind of 5-alpha-reductase. As a result, the novel alternates between the past and the present, telling the storey of a three-generation immigrant family. The tale is about how Cal/Lie develops as a whole while maintaining her uniqueness.

This paper looks at the analytical side of Cal's hermaphroditism, verifying the author's work through Erikson's theory and pointing to future research opportunities.

## II. ANXIETY OF HERMAPHRODITISM

Erik Erikson is best known for his psychosocial development theory, which focuses on personality analysis. Unlike Freud, Erikson thought that a person's personality changes as they grow up in a culture that transforms them and their family. In certain ways, society has a significant impact on the development of personality traits in people in all situations. The psychosexual developmental theory of Sigmund Freud is well-known. The term "psychosocial" refers to "the influence of social elements on an individual's mind or behaviour, as well as the interrelationship between behavioural and social aspects" (Oxford Dictionary, 2012). All of the variables play a role in the development of the ego identity. Ego identity is nothing more than the self's involvement for its benefit. Erikson demonstrates that ego identity is never stable. It tends to change as people age. He argues that a sense of competence motivates people to act and behave in certain ways. When the stages of life are successfully managed, humans may have a sense of mastery, which is known as ego strength or equality, according to Erikson's theory.

According to every stage as mentioned by Erikson, he believes that people will undergo a conflict that serves as a turning point in an individual's behaviour. He brings out that conflicts are often positive and negative at the very same time. It differs from one person to another. The following are the eight stages mentioned by Erikson for the psychosocial development of an individual:

1. Trust vs Mistrust
2. Autonomy vs Shame
3. Initiative vs Guilt
4. Industry vs Inferiority
5. Identity vs Role Confusion
6. Intimacy vs Isolation
7. Generativity vs Stagnation
8. Ego Integrity vs Despair (Cherry, *Understanding Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development* 2021)

Kakar (1968) in his paper brings out the four main coordinates from Erikson's theory to understand and analyse in deep as:

- Contemporary stage of an individual
- Life history (psycho-sexual and psychosocial)
- Contemporary of socio-cultural unit of which he is a part.
- History of socio-cultural unit.

From the above mentioned to understand the protagonist's quest for self and the political conflicts the characters went through; stages 5,6& 7 is used in detail.

The plot of Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex* moves from the past to the present at the same time, with only mythical relevance. In an interview, Eugenides says, "I tried to be as precise as possible regarding the medical and genetic aspects of my narrator's existence." Cal begins the narrative by attempting to piece together his grandparents' lives. He can be imaginative in his presentation of that storey, but he never strays from the plausible. As the work progresses, it becomes more naturalistic, more of a modern psychological and sociological novel. In general, the work explores several philosophies while focusing on a hereditary condition induced by the incestuous relationship between the narrator's grandparents. Eugenides did an excellent job of narrating the storey and portraying the characters in a way that was consistent with Greek mythology. Eugenides made the readers appreciate the hardships faced by the narrator throughout his life and as a human in general. Eugenides was primarily influenced by his grandparents' migration narrative. He also read Michael Foucault's introduction to "Herculine Barbin," in which the protagonist is an intersex human.

The search for the narrator's identity begins in the third book. Warner (2000) says about identity, "Imagine having no discarded egos, no vestigial selves, no obvious ruptures with yourself that require accommodation." Cal/Lie, the narrator, argues in his search for identification that identity is like a fluid of flux that changes as the individual encounters it. "I was born twice: first as a girl in January 1960, on a relatively smog-free Detroit day, and then as a teenage guy in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August 1974" (Eugenides, 3). This emphasises the point that Cal/status lie's as a "Pseudo hermaphrodite" of 5-Alpha-reductase has been questioned. There are several intersex narratives and cases. Eugenides manipulates the reader by making up the narrator's chromosomes. He also

stated that he has never interviewed or spoken with intersex people. He only ever imagined and analysed the characters from his own perspective. Erikson's stage 5 of Identity versus Role Confusion depicts the shift that occurs during adolescence when self-suffers in revealing their actual nature of identity. Cal/lie was in 7th grade when she expected to hit puberty like all the other females in her class. "I think you're growing, Cal," Tessie's/his mother says (Eugenides, 303). Cal/lie had the distinct impression that she was about to enter puberty. But fate forced her to deal with and grow through situations she had not anticipated.

*I grew tall. My voice matured. But nothing seemed unnatural. My slight build, my thin waist, the smallness of my head, hands, and feet raised no question in anybody's mind. My genetic males raised as girls don't blend in so easily ... My rickety height and foal's legs gave me the posture of a fashion model. My clothes weren't right, but my angularity was. I had that saluki look.* (Eugenides, p.304.)

Cal/lie questioned her state of self-regarding changes within her that took place. *"I began to exude some kind of masculinity, in that way I tossed up"* (Eugenides, 304). Cal/Lie gets to realise her physical changes and understand that she is not normal within the norms framed by society. S/he is somewhere between *"performativity has enabled a powerful appreciation of the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes"* (Sedgwick & Parker, *Performativity and Performance* 1995)

Cal/lie frames herself as "freakier" (Eugenides, 304) than ever at the age of thirteen, seeing the body hairs all over. In some ways, s/he is relieved that her/his parents' love for her/him has remained constant despite her/his transformation in the spotlight. Cal/Lie learns that her parents' primary concern was that she "wouldn't attract boys, that I'd be a wallflower like Aunt Zo" (Eugenides, p.305). Only halfway through the storey does the reader get a glimpse of the narrator's intersexuality. During the early years, children were not adequately educated about the changes that occur during puberty and what to expect and what not to expect. Not only the girls of the day, but even the boys, had little knowledge of this subject. Currently, as technology advances, youngsters are better able to understand and question topics like physical changes and so on. Tessie was no different, and she didn't even try to explain the changes to her daughter or reassure her that it's normal for women and nothing to be concerned about. Cal/lie learns about these changes in her body from the posters and graffiti in the basement restroom. Cal/lie began to realise that s/he was on the verge of discovering her intersexual identity, and Cal/lie desired to go through the same stages of development as every woman. Because of society's retroactive rules, she began to fake her periods. This reflects the narrator's perplexity, and Eugenides ensured that the readers understood the conflict between science and society through his words. Eugenides piques the readers' interest by revealing information on the migration and growth of Cal/Lie as a whole on each page.

Cal/bodily lie's changes cause the reader to evaluate their own feelings on intersex and their perspective on it. Stage 5 raises the issue of self and the way humans form hazy pictures of who they are in the context of society's laws. Finally, when a person embraces and discovers who they are as a whole person, they are more likely to live an optimistic life. On the sixth stage, Erikson begins with Intimacy vs. Isolation. Her encounter with her anonymous buddy "Obscure Object" reawakens her sense of solitude. "Writing my tale isn't the daring act of emancipation I had anticipated it would be," she said when Dr. Luce forced her to write about her sexual experience with an "obvious object" (Eugenides, p.325). Then, in the end, s/he opens up by saying, *"I watched her in class and I watched her outside of it, too. Her brief appearances always knocked me out"* (Eugenides, p.325). She also made certain that her name was kept private from the public for "sentimental reasons."

When the mother failed to nurture her about the body changes and when s/he was attracted to an obscure object, she kept it as a secret. *Why should I have thought I was anything other than a girl? Because I was attracted to a girl... it was happening more than ever in 1974"* (Eugenides, p.388). She was scared to admit the truth about her gender crisis. Because intersex is not a common term during her period, and she/he felt unsafe in her/his own home. Home is a place where humans should feel safe with themselves, without any masks. Her/his realisation of *"something in between"* (Eugenides, p.375) happened when s/he was attracted to Obscure's brother Jerome. Also, s/he made the readers feel in her place by saying, *"Put yourself in my shoes, reader, and ask yourself what conclusion you would have come to about your sex"* (Eugenides, 388). Cal/lie sees "crocus" as nothing more than a source of pleasure discovered within her own body, indicating its normalcy while also expressing her gender crisis worry. Also, s/he made a point that *"the birth things never are." Birth, I mean, and death. and love. And what love bequeaths to us before we're born "*(Eugenides, 388).

Her fear of her hermaphroditism stems from her adolescent experience of not knowing who she really is, and her sexuality's exposure with Obscure and Jerome made her feel melancholy about her uniqueness.

### III. SELF-REALIZATION

According to Foucault, power constructions within a given society determine what is sexually deviant and what is not, as well as what is acceptable and what cannot be accepted. When s/he was taken to Dr. Luce, who is a leading authority on human hermaphroditism, and he is someone from the early days who resembles Dr. John Money from the real world. Dr. Luce examined Cal/lie's changes and concluded that she is a "male pseudo hermaphrodite – genetically male but appearing otherwise, with 5-Alpha-Reductase deficiency syndrome" (Eugenides, p.413). Dr. Luce is someone who was a leading human hermaphroditism analyst at *"The Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic," which was founded in 1968* (Eugenides, p.409).

From the words of Cal/Lie, *"from outside, you can look, inspect, compare. From inside, there is no comparison"* (Middlesex 409). When she is physically making out with Jerome, s/he understands her identity via Erikson's point of view. She continues further on, *"I had an interior like a girl... my chest was completely flat... Muscles? Not much to speak of. There are no hips or a waist. A dinner plate of a girl The low-cal special"* (Eugenides, 388). After escaping from Jerome, she was hit by the tractor, and she was hospitalised and realised that she was not a regular human. Later, s/he was taken to Dr. Luce for further check-ups as *"he registered my tenor voice."* *He noted that I sat with one leg tucked under me. He watched how I examined my nails... of all external manifestations of what he called my "gender identity"* (Eugenides, 408). S/he was taken as a case study: *"My body has been shut down in order to get through this ordeal"* (Eugenides, p.453). In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault comments on the significance of desire and its relationship to the flesh: *"A twofold evolution tended to make the flesh the root of all evil, shifting the most important moment of transgression from the act of itself to the stirrings—so difficult to perceive and formulate—of desire"* (Foucault, 1978). This rethinks how intersex people felt during their critical time of identity crisis.

After examining Cal/Lie, Dr. Luce concluded to her/his parents that surgery was the only solution as *"Callie is a girl who has a little too much male hormone. We want to correct that."* (Eugenides, p.427). Until a few decades ago, the American dynasty had never heard of intersex or LGBTQ people. While she's been on a case study, she hears terms regularly and she understands that it's something related to her anatomy. *"Muscular habitus... no gynecomastia... hypospadias... urogenital sinus... blind vaginal pouch..."* (Eugenides, p.421). He referred to the terms from the library, which said that "hypospadias" is nothing but a "hermaphrodite," which means "monster." She became terrified, and s/he later discovers the file titled "PRELIMINARY STUDY: GENETIC XY (MALE) RAISED AS FEMALE" (Eugenides, p.435). Following the end note, she discovers *"...firmly established as female the times her conditions were discovered..., when feminising the surgery was in its infancy"* (Eugenides, p.437). She got scared of the surgery and ran away from the hospital, writing a letter to her parents concluding, *"Dr. Luce, who is a big liar!" I am not a girl. I'm a boy. That's what I found today* (Eugenides, p.439). And for the last time, she pens her name as Callie. *We're all made up of many parts, other halves. Not just me* (Eugenides, p.440). The protagonist was no more Callie, but Cal instead. When he saw his male face in the mirror, he felt at home. Eugenides played with the character settling in San Francisco, where it is a place with people who are well developed, and the narrator is developed physically and mentally. There he finds someone who accepts him as who he is, a person named Zora. She is someone who "prefers to identify herself as a hermaphrodite" (Eugenides, p.487–488). Cal felt safe and he felt like he was at home with his type of people. Zora made it clear that *"sex is biological. Gender is cultural"* (Eugenides, 489). As Carroll (2009) writes, quoting the novel: *"If the parallel between sexed and cultural hybridity were to be pursued, this might seem a promising location from which to explore a post-sexed identity:" This once-divided city reminds me of myself. My struggle for unification, for Einheit. Coming from a city still cut in half by racial hatred, I feel hopeful here."* Cal's narrative format allows readers to grasp the philosophy of the American dream as well as the terrible reality of it.

Cal then meets Julie Kikuchi, with whom he had his first real date, and he felt at home with her. That brought the positivity to the stage of intimacy versus isolation, according to Erikson's point of view. Butler brings out the gender descriptions as follows: *"When we ask, what are the conditions of intelligibility by which humans emerge, by which humans are recognized, by which some subject becomes the subject of love, we are asking about conditions of intelligibility composed of norms of practices that have become presuppositional."* *This is what Foucault describes as the politics of truth, a politics that pertains to those relations of power that order the world in certain regular and relatable ways, and which we come to accept as the given field of knowledge"* (Butler, 1990/1999). That shows the importance of humans in recognising the politics of gender. Through Zora and Julie, Cal educates himself and starts a new life.

When Cal returns home after releasing the death of his father, he says, *"I like to think my father's love for me was strong enough that he could have accepted me... with respect to my father, I will always remain a girl."* There's a kind of purity in that, the purity of childhood (Eugenides, p.512). Cal reached his final stage of anxiety when he was accepted by his mother and by his brother, Chapter Eleven. Only at the end of the novel does Cal discover that the reason for her birth is his grandparent's incest marriage and giving birth. *Maybe I made a mistake yesterday, but yesterday's me is still me. I am who I am today, with all my faults. Tomorrow I might be a tiny bit wiser, and that's me, too. These faults and mistakes are who I am, making up the brightest stars in the constellation of my life. I have come to love myself for who I was, who I am, and who I hope to become"* (Washington Post, 2018). Cal has finally embraced his intersex identity and is looking forward to a peaceful future.

From intersex studies, Cal is a rare piece of stardust. Most people of his type wanted to be "fixed" or "corrected" immediately. By the turn of the century, medical technology had "advanced" to the point where it could "make bodies that had once been objects of awe and astonishment vanish from view, all in the name of correcting nature's mistake" (Sterling, 2000, p. 37). To be more specific, he claims that in many circumstances, faults are not recognised or discovered early enough to be corrected. This increases the duty of parents, who play a critical role in the physical and emotional well-being of their children.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex* is a postmodern work with vintage motifs. It's a more in-depth look at the human reaction to Cal's situation. In the words of Callie Stephanides, Eugenides has used the time travel technique to go from the past to the present. Cal's storey and the author's experiences of the American dream have a small resemblance. On the other hand, Eugenides writes his own autobiography in the form of a concealed narrator. "The writing itself is also about mixing things up," writes Schwarzbum (2002) in *Entertainment Weekly*, "grafting flights of descriptive fancy with hunks of conversational dialogue, pausing briefly to sketch passing characters or explain a bit of bygone world." To sum up, God made each and every human being unique in their own right. There is no need for us to distinguish ourselves. Parents must teach their children to treat everyone equally healthy and happy, regardless of race or ethnicity. Parents should educate their children on the importance of physical changes that occur as they develop, since they are fairly common, and teach them to embrace themselves for who they are.

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**Amuthavalli S** is a Research Scholar in the field of English language and Literature belonging to the School of Social Science and Languages at Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai Campus. Her research area of Interest is Literature specifically in the genre of Psychological thriller, Mysteries and Suspense related.

**Saradha Rajkumar** is working as a Professor belonging to the School of Social Science and Languages at Vellore Institute of Technology Chennai Campus. Her research area of interest is Literature and ELT.