

RESEARCH ARTICLE



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QUEER ANALYSIS IN JEFFREY EUGENIDES' NOVEL MIDDLESEX

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ABSTRACT

This paper is going to discuss the novel *Middlesex* on the basis of queer analysis. This novel is a Pulitzer Prize winning novel by Jeffrey Eugenides. It is based on the effect of a mutated gene on three generations of a Greek family which made momentous changes in the life of Cal who is the protagonist of the novel. It discusses the pursuit of the American dream and explores gender identity. With a deep observation the title refers to Cal who was born with both male and female genitalia. The origin of queer theory was in LGBT studies which focus on sexuality and gender. It soon distanced itself from those approaches due to disagreement with the stable identities that LGBT studies suggest. This theory questions socially established norms and dualistic categories with a special focus on challenging sexual, gender, class and racial classifications. As a complete theory it was formed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Diana Fuss and Adrienne Rich in 1990.

Key words: Queer theory, LGBT studies, Norms and dualistic categories, Mutated gene, *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides

The strange visit of queer theory

Queer theory is a brand-new branch of study also known as theoretical speculation; it has only been named as an area since 1990. It grew out of gay and lesbian studies. On the other hand both gay and lesbian studies grew out of feminist studies and feminist theory. The word queer in queer theory has some of these connotations, particularly its alignment with ideas about homosexuality. In the 1990s, queer theory has emerged as an influential mode of thought in the ongoing debate about empowerment issues. Queer theory is concerned with the non-essentializing nature of sexual identities and is premised on the notion of resistance to forms of domination, such as heterosexism and homophobia.

Queer theory as an academic tool came about in part from gender and sexuality studies that in turn had their origins from lesbians, gay studies and feminist theory. This theory contests many of the set ideas of the more established fields it comes from challenging the notion of defined and finite identity categories, as well as the norms that create a binary of good versus bad sexualities.

The term homosexuality can refer both attraction and sexual behavior between people from same sex. It is contrasted with heterosexuality, bisexuality and asexuality. According to some scientists sexual orientation is the result of a complex interaction of environmental, cognitive and biological factors. Homosexuality does not appear to be adaptive from an evolutionary standpoint because it

does not produce children. There are number of biological factors have been considered by scientists such as prenatal hormones, chromosomes, polygenetic effects, brain structure and viral influences were placed as the influencing factors for the strange act of homosexuality.

In his well-known novel *Middlesex*, Jeffrey Eugenides has presented the strange theme of homosexuality which under the strange theory of queer. In this novel the glimpses of queerness was carried out by the protagonist named Calliope Stephanides. With the use of the word sex the novelist has made a play in the life of the Calliope. The protagonist not aware of his sex and transformations in his life.

Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*

The novel was published in the year 2002 and awarded by Pulitzer Prize. The presented characters and events were based on the observation of Greek heritage. This novel was categorized as a coming- of- age story and family saga. It revolves around the effect of a mutated gene on three generations of a Greek family which becomes the main factor and causes various changes in the life of protagonist. The novel was divided into several sections. Among those sections, first is about cal's family who is the protagonist of this novel. This section gives a detailed depiction of his grand parents' migration from Bursa to the United States in 1922. Another section portrays the experiences of cal in his hometown of Detroit and his escape to San Francisco where he comes to terms with his modified gender identity.

Queer theory focuses its attention on the people who were marginalized by the traditional norms of the society. It gives life to those peculiar human beings. In this novel this strange life was carried out by the protagonist. The very opening of the novel portrays the glimpses of queer theory. She said that "I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974." (Middlesex 3)

The protagonist is presented as a peculiar person of having both the male and female characteristics due to the deficiency called 5 Alpha Reductase Deficiency. Specialized readers may have come across me in Dr. Peter Luce's study, "Gender Identity in 5- Alpha- Reductase Pseudohermaphrodites," (...) My birth certificate lists my name as Calliope Helen Stephanides. My most recent driver's license records my first name simply as Cal. (Middlesex 3)

While referring the feminine quality the protagonist was named as Cal. On the other hand to refer his masculinity he was named as Calliope Stephanides. Like Tiresias he was first one thing and then the other. There are several things to take hold of in this extremely potent opening line. Due to the queerness Cal have been ridiculed by classmates, palpated by specialists and researched by the march of Dimes. It is difficult to refer the gender of this character hence the protagonist has been created as an intersex of both male and female characteristics.

There is a big question mark whether the protagonist is a male or female. This is the defining premise of this novel which is revealed on its very first page and the continual dilemma of the protagonist as s/he struggles to come to grips with a definition of self that will make life livable. Cal described his entry into this world with his own words. It is a custom of the society to marginalize when the person is identified as a homosexual person. But the protagonist Cal has been excluded from this list as he himself not aware of the sexuality. He can be termed as s/he since there is no constructed term to refer the gender of Cal.

The queer life of the protagonist

In the process of the novel Cal has maintained sexual relationship with both a man and woman. At school Calliope was attracted by the beauty of another girl without knowing that what she was. Cal has named her beloved as an obscure object. For the surprise note she was indulged in a sexual relationship with a man called Jerome who is a brother of that obscure object. During their relationship Cal was petrified that Jerome might have found something wrong with her. One day while, Calliope is subtly stroking the object's genitals,

Jerome witnessed their relationship and make fun of them for lesbians. Here comes the characteristics of queer theory as homosexual relationship was happened between Cal and that obscure object. Cal attacked Jerome and ran to secure her life. While she is running, she fails to see the tractor headed her way and she crashes into it.

At the hospital the doctors realized that there is something wrong with her genitals. They recommend her parents to approach Dr. Luce for this strange case. After examining her for several weeks, he tells her parents that she is essentially a girl with male hormones kicking in at puberty. Calliope reads her written report and realizes that she is, biologically and genitically a boy. Freaked out by this information she runs away.

When Calliope hits puberty she starts looking with masculine characteristics. In medical terms Cal was described as an intersex man of Greek descent with 5- alpha- reductase deficiency which causes him to have certain feminine traits. Jeffrey Eugenides has presented his protagonist with sexual correction of ambiguous genitalia. The theme of sexual correction of ambiguous genitalia is highly relevant in *Middlesex*. Without knowing the reality, "A redheaded girl from Grosse Pointe fell in love with me, not knowing what I was. Her brother liked me, too. (...) I've left my body in order to occupy others and all this happened before I turned sixteen. But now, at the age of forty- one, I feel another birth coming on. (Middlesex 6)

Conclusion

When Cal was transformed herself as a man named Calliope, he tried to get escape himself from the discrimination of the society against homosexual and intersexual persons. In the second part of his life he has developed a relationship with a girl called Julie Kikuchi. Though she was at her thirty- six, she looked as twenty- six. Her profession is photography. Calliope described her as short without being small and irreverent without being crude. Her right hand is partly arthritic from an elevator accident. He said that, "I like Julie Kikuchi. I like her a lot" (Middlesex 264).

In the concluding of this novel, the protagonist was ended himself with the relationship of an Asian woman. She accepts him after knowing his entire queer past life. They both start their new life together and the novel ends with the optimistic tone for the homosexual people.

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