

Selma Raljević
Džemal Bijedić University of Mostar

TRANSCENDING THE BINARY: VIEWS, VOICES, PEOPLE, AND PLACES IN/OF JEFFREY EUGENIDES'S *MIDDLESEX*

Abstract

This paper explores the views, voices, people, and places in/of Jeffrey Eugenides's 2002 novel *Middlesex*, which transcends traditional binary thinking and paradigms in many ways. It focuses on the views, voice(s), and spatiality of the narrator and protagonist who was born as a girl and named Calliope Stephanides and, at present, has socially been identified as an adult man Cal, who is, in fact, a hermaphrodite. The book is both a *Bildungsroman* about a hermaphrodite and a family saga, told from the inside and the outside. The story about Calliope's evolution into Cal is, at the same time, the odyssey of his or her or *their*—either the singular or nonbinary *their*—Greek grandparents's emigration from what is now Turkey to the United States. It traces the lives of three generations of the Stephanides family. Like the genes, their storylines interact with one another to produce one body of *Middlesex*. As this suggests, *Middlesex*'s genes, metaphorically speaking, are both American and Greek. The novel explores the human body as well as the body of humankind, including the anatomy of Detroit's decline (as well as the social history of the U.S.), in order to articulate the past, identify the present, and move toward the future. It also explores the aesthetics of normality which, as *Middlesex* elaborates, can never be a single story. The paper analyzes these and similar issues in order to shed light on how Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* transcends multiple traditional binaries.

Key words: Middlesex, Jeffrey Eugenides, hermaphrodite, the aesthetics of normality, transcending the binary

Jeffrey Eugenides is one of the most recognized contemporary American writers whose books have shed new light on many important issues of contemporary human experience and on the features of the literary aesthetics of a new -ism, whatever its name might be. His second novel, *Middlesex* (2002), which can be seen as “a place designed for a new type of human being, who would inhabit a new world” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 529), won the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Eugenides’s literary and visionary perceptions of the “New Man” represent, among other things, a utopian¹⁴ (yet possible) concept that involves the idea of re-creation, or, re-understanding of a brave, new human being in a new, brave world, being both a “hybrid” in a “hybrid” narrative of a narrator/protagonist whose identity is thus “hybrid”. As Debra Shostak, for example, argues in her article, “‘Theory Uncompromised by Practicality’: Hybridity in Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex*,” Eugenides “implicitly overdetermines the metaphor of hybridity to refer at once to the body, to cultural identity, and to narrative structure” (2008, p. 384). The ethos of the novel is, metaphorically speaking, a “subterranean realm” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 329). It is an expression of the unembellished reality of “a new type of human being” whose voice arises from the “underground,” from the place where she or he or they, either the singular or nonbinary *they*, “wrote down what they couldn’t say, where they gave voices to their most shameful longings and knowledge” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 329). Her or his or their longings are, in many ways, “a desire for recognition” and “it is only through the experience of recognition that any of us becomes constituted as socially viable beings”¹⁵ (Butler, 2004, p. 2). The subterranean

¹⁴ In relation to the theoretical ideas of culture during the 1990s and, especially, to Homi K. Bhabha’s ideas about cultural hybridity (2004), Francisco Collado Rodriguez says that *Middlesex* “demands the opening of a borderland or ‘third space’ where mixed races and intersex identities can coexist” (2006, p. 73). He adds that it is a process which requires “a new type of ethical responsibility, one that openly advocates for a hybrid space of tolerance for individuals and communities” (2006, p. 83). However, Debra Shostak argues that “no matter how generous and optimistic Eugenides is, it demonstrates the virtual impossibility of such a ‘third space’ except as a utopian fantasy” (2008, pp. 386-387).

¹⁵ In *Undoing Gender*, Butler discusses the Hegelian notion of desire in its connection with recognition, and adds: “That view has its allure and its truth, but it also misses a couple of important points. The terms by which we are recognized as humans are socially articulated and changeable. [...] The human is understood differently depending on its race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, the recognizability of that morphology, its sex, the perceptual verifiability of that sex, its ethnicity, the categorical understanding of that ethnicity. Certain humans are recognized as less than human, and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life. Certain humans are not recognized as humans at all, and that leads to yet another order of unlivable life. If part of what desire wants is to gain recognition, then gender, insofar as it is animated by desire, will want recognition as well. But if the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that ‘undo’ the person by conferring recognition, or ‘undo’ the person by withholding recognition, then

realm of Eugenides's novel also includes the "overground" perspective of reality, so as to shape the "cross-terranean" reality by replacing the binary and linear concepts with the simultaneous and juxtaposed spaces. The concept of reality in/of *Middlesex* microcosmically represents the whole of humanity in a keen observation of a real world, simultaneously invoking the past, the mythical, and antic momentum. *Middlesex* illustrates something that might be called the free "evolution" of the body of contemporary consciousness since the "architecture" of the novel is "an attempt to rediscover the pure origins" (Eugenides, 2002, p. 273). The latter is, in *Middlesex*, an explanation of the architecture of an undesirable house, symbolically called "Middlesex," which a Greek-American family, the Stephanides (Milton Stephanides, to be more precise), also undesirable in the "aristocratic" society of Grosse Pointe in declining Detroit, MI, wanted, and then bought. Middlesex is the name of the street the Stephanides lived on, so the narrator refers to the house by its street address. In that manner, within *Middlesex*, the novel, in Middlesex, the house, among other places, spaces, and locations, a new (yet old) type of human being(re)discovers one's own middlesex. The gender of all these entities—the novel, the house, and the man—is therefore middlesex. As Shostak points out, the novel "introduces concerns about biological essentialism, historical causality, and social transgressiveness under the complementary trope of genetics" (2008, p. 384).

Middlesex thus challenges conceptual and binary categories. The narrator, who is also the protagonist of the novel, was born a girl and named Calliope Stephanides and, in the present, has socially been identified as an adult man Cal, who is, in fact, a Greek-American hermaphrodite. Eugenides thus employs an "I" which is both male and female. While writing about his/her/their own life, Cal states that despite his/her/their, now "andragonized brain, there's an innate feminine circularity in the story" (Eugenides, 2002, p. 20) he/she/they has to tell. The "third gender" creates the third space of *Middlesex* in the light of the following thought: "Many cultures on earth operated not with two genders but with three. And the third was always special, exalted, endowed with mystical gifts" (Eugenides, 2002, p. 495). Hence, one of the *gifts* of *Middlesex* is to challenge the traditional definition of gender, including "the gender" of experience, break down the rigid binary oppositions, and experiment with the non-binary in many ways. These and similar issues are explored in the rest of the article in order to provide an in-depth analysis on how Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* transcends traditional binary paradigms in many ways.

recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced. This means that to the extent that desire is implicated in social norms, it is bound up with the question of power and with the problem of who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not" (2004, p. 2).

By re-examining history, *Middlesex* re-discovers “the pure origins” of its text and context, and then of its history and memory, body and mind, spoken and unspoken, longings and knowledge, yet not in the construct of a binary opposition as there is no opposition without its “other.” In other words, neither side of an opposition can exist without its other. In recognizing that binary oppositions are equally important parts of one body, *Middlesex* re-creates history and its genre. Accordingly, in the light of contemporary intentions, aiming at a “new sincerity” (Kelly, 2014), openness, veracity, freedom, faith, trust, and dialogue, Eugenides’s novel tends to focus on how both the mind and the body perceive history. In this manner, mostly within the first-person narrative mode of *Middlesex*, the second-person narrative voice says: “You get older, you puff on the stairs, you enter the body of your father. From there it’s only a quick jump to your grandparents, and then before you know it you’re time-traveling. In this life we grow backwards” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 425). *Middlesex* thus transcends a postmodern endeavor to examine the question of what history itself might be and, foremost, poses a “new” question that is: “What’s the reason for studying history? To understand the present or to avoid it?” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 80). The question tends to focus on the life of the present. The answer remains free and open to the ever-new possibility of what comes next. It also surpasses the postmodern notion of reality and the concept of simulacrum by recognizing them as the constructs of experience without experience and, therefore, of life that evades real life. History in *Middlesex*, and that of its middlesex narrator/protagonist, is encoded in the genes of the body of both the present and the future. It can repeat itself, but it can also produce some changes, including mutations, in the process of evolution. The “American Dream” has “mutated” as well. It has changed, or, become re-understood over the course of history of *Middlesex* and become more universal and transnational for embracing the human condition across the borders of nation-states¹⁶ that has always been in the “genes” of the U.S. simply because it is and has always been a nation of immigrants. Its “new” ethos is the leitmotif of the novel presented in the idea of utopian hope and dystopian despair that is rooted in the words written on the Detroit city flag: “*Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus*. We hope for better things, it will rise from the ashes” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 80). Correspondingly, *Middlesex* does rise from the ashes of Cal(liope)’s past, whose female variant of the name evokes the muse of epic poetry. At one point, the narrator of the novel says that Calliope’s duty was to live out a mythical life in the actual world while his, Cal’s, is to tell about it now: the story about a hermaphrodite that is, in a sense, a modern epic of creation that “grows backwards.”

¹⁶ In Steven Vertovec’s definition, transnationalism “broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (2009, p. 1).

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.

[...] My birth certificate lists my name as Calliope Helen Stephanides. My most recent driver's license (from the Federal Republic of Germany) records my first name simply as Cal. [...] Like Tiresias, I was first one thing and then the other. I've been ridiculed by classmates, guinea-pigged by doctors, palpated by specialists, and researched by the March of Dimes. A redheaded girl from Grosse Pointe fell in love with me, not knowing what I was. (Her brother liked me, too.) An army tank led me into urban battle once; a swimming pool turned me into myth; 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. After decades of neglect, I find myself thinking about departed great-aunts and -uncles, long-lost grandfathers, unknown fifth cousins, or, in the case of an inbred family like mine, all those things in one. And before it's too late I want to get it down for good: this roller-coaster ride of a single gene through time. Sing now, o Muse, of the recessive mutation on my fifth chromosome! Sing how it bloomed two and a half centuries ago on the slopes of Mount Olympus, while the goats bleated and the olives dropped. Sing how it passed down through nine generations, gathering invisibly within the polluted pool of the Stephanides family. And sing how Providence, in the guise of massacre, sent the gene flying again; how it blew like a seed across the sea to America, where it drifted through our industrial rains until it fell to earth in the fertile soil of my mother's own midwestern womb. (Eugenides, 2002, pp. 3-4)

The narrator ends his "prologue" or "invocation" in a comic-epic manner. He says, "[s]orry if I get a little Homeric at times. That's genetic, too" (Eugenides, 2002, p. 4). Eugenides traces Cal's genes through his family genealogy "to locate a genetic explanation for Cal's position in such a way as to draw not just an analogy but also a logical connection between the discourses of ethnic and gendered identities" (Shostak, 2008, p. 386).

Middlesex's genes are both American and Greek. Its "conflation of meanings under the sign of hybridity allows [its] two narrative components—the immigrant family epic and the hermaphrodite's coming-of-age memoir—to attempt to bring into alignment the discourses of gender and ethnic identity" (Shostak, 2008, p. 387). *Middlesex* is both a *Bildungsroman* about a Greek-American hermaphrodite and a transnational family saga, told from the inside and the outside. The story about Calliope's evolution into Cal is, at the same time, the odyssey of his/her/their "grandparents' emigration from what is now Turkey to America" (Bedell, 2002). It traces the lives of three generations of the Stephanides family, originally coming from Bithynios, a tiny village above

Bursa in Asia Minor. Like the genes, their storylines interact with one another to produce one body of *Middlesex*, a newtype of novel which could be seen as a “genetic” novel. It is, in a way, a “new” book of genesis. Eugenides’s mythical and, at the same time, contemporary tale spiritually, yet realistically explores the human body as well as the body of humankind, including the anatomy of Detroit’s decline, in order to articulate the past, identify the present, and move toward the future. In this way, *Middlesex* becomes the story about all of us, about our creation, existence, and humanity. It re-examines human nature backwards to grow forward.

Middlesex also explores the aesthetics of normality, pointing out that “[n]ormality wasn’t normal. It couldn’t be. If normality were normal, everybody could leave it alone. They could sit back and let normality manifest itself” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 446). Taken all together, *Middlesex* possesses “an awkward, extravagant beauty” in its “inadvertent harmony” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 218). Its essence goes beyond the postmodern notion of life without essence by re-discovering the real beneath the surface. The essence of normality in/of *Middlesex* is, for example, in re-discovering that “hermaphrodites are people like everybody else” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 106). In this context, Eugenides’s inspiration for the creation of *Middlesex* emerges from his dissatisfaction after reading the 1980 *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite* with an introduction by Michel Foucault¹⁷ (Oprah & Eugenides, 2007). The memoir frustrated Eugenides’s readerly expectations with its melodramatic prose and the inability or unwillingness to give an insight into the anatomy and emotions of intersex people. In Shostak’s book, the questions raised by the hermaphrodite’s narrative in *Middlesex* “center on embodiment, on the place of the body in constituting

¹⁷ In his Introductory note, Foucault, for example, says that the memoir is “a document drawn from that strange history of our ‘true sex,’” and adds: “It is not unique, but it is rare enough. It is the journal or rather the memoirs that were left by one of those individuals whom medicine and the law in the nineteenth century relentlessly questioned about their genuine sexual identity.

Brought up as a poor and deserving girl in a milieu that was almost exclusively feminine and strongly religious, Herculine Barbin, who was called Alexina by her familiars, as finally recognized as being ‘truly’ a young man. Obligated to make a legal change of sex after judicial proceedings and a modification of his civil status, he was incapable of adapting himself to a new identity and ultimately committed suicide. I would be tempted to call the story banal were it not for two or three things that give it a particular intensity.

The date, first of all. The years from around 1860 and 1870 were precisely one of those periods when investigations of sexual identity were carried out with the most intensity, in an attempt not only to establish the true sex of hermaphrodites but also to identify, classify, and characterize the different types of perversions. In short, these investigations dealt with the problem of sexual anomalies in the individual and the race” (1980, pp. XI-XII)

the subject. The hermaphrodite not only challenges the simple equation of sex and gender but also disrupts the notions of sex and the sexualized body” (2008, p. 387). As Anne Fausto-Sterling emphasizes, sex “is not a pure physical category” (2000, p. 4). The notion of sex and gender, or, to use Rosi Braidotti’s words, “[t]he body, or the embodiment, of the subject is to be understood as neither biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological” (1994, p. 4). Additionally, Eugenides was inspired by the figure of Tiresias in Greek mythology who lived as both a male and a female and had the power to tell the future. Eugenides, however, did not want to write about a myth. He wanted to create a story that would trace the transmigrations of a genetic mutation down through the bloodline of a single family to the final inheritor of the gene, encompassing all kinds of transformations such as national, racial, intellectual, and sexual.

Middlesex is written in the form of a transformative memoir. It switches between first-person, second-person, and third-person points of view several times. At times, it also employs the first-person plural point of view, and it switches or blends genders. Its language is transformative. The novel not only combines a personal diary of Cal’s body and soul, a national memoir, and a social chronicle of Detroit, but it also combines English, Greek, and, sometimes, German, and then the different and alternative discourses in their groundbreaking possibilities of the binary blends. In a new auto-referential performance on intimacy between the author, the text, and the reader, the narrator explains the language, space, and motion of his story:

Emotions, in my experience, aren’t covered by single words. I don’t believe in “sadness,” “joy,” or “regret.” Maybe the best proof that the language is patriarchal is that it oversimplifies feelings. I’d like to have at my disposal complicated hybrid *-emotions, Germanic traincar constructions like, say, “the happiness that attends disaster.” Or “the disappointment of sleeping with one’s fantasy.” I’d like to show how “intimations of mortality brought on by aging family members” connects with “the hatred of mirrors that begins in middle age.” I’d like to have a word for “the sadness inspired by failing restaurants” as well as for “the excitement of getting a room with a minibar.” I’ve never had the right words to describe my life, and now that I’ve entered my story, I need them more than ever. I can’t just sit back and watch from a distance anymore. From here on in, everything I’ll tell you is colored by the subjective experience of being part of events. Here’s where my story splits, divides, undergoes meiosis. Already the world feels heavier, now I’m a part of it. I’m talking about bandages and sopped cotton, the smell of mildew in movie theaters, and of all the lousy cats and their stinking litter boxes, of rain on city streets when the dust comes up and the old Italian men take their folding chairs inside. Up until now it hasn’t been my world. Not my America. (Eugenides, 2002, p. 217)

To paraphrase the narrator's words about his/her/their own gender, *Middlesex* does not fit into any theory. Eugenides himself explains, "[s]ince I was writing about the transmission of a genetic mutation, it seemed to me sensible and also incumbent on me to reiterate the transition in terms of the literary form. I hope the book quietly and not fist-poundingly moves from a more epic narration towards a more psychological novel" (Bedell, 2002). The novel blends myth and reality, facts and fiction, science and imagination, as well as intersexuality and immigration, and then personal and social, seamlessly juxtaposing both the American and Greek past and present. Its space is multidimensional, simultaneously articulating a personal story and a national history, and it represents America in all its variety. However, *Middlesex* prompts national self-criticism, focusing on Detroit in its transformation from an industrial incarnation of the "American Dream" to "the so-called ghetto [that] would become the entire city itself" (Eugenides, 2002, p. 142). Like his literary predecessors, but from the standpoint of contemporary aesthetics, Eugenides notices that human nature has changed. Virginia Woolf, for example, in her famous essay, "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown," written in 1924, remarks that "on or about December 1910, human character changed" (p. 2). In *Middlesex*, Eugenides observes a moment of a mutation in human nature, which has caused a new transfiguration of self into a non-self, a machine. That moment is a

[h]istorical fact: people stopped being human in 1913. That was the year Henry Ford put his cars on rollers and made his workers adopt the speed of the assembly line. At first, workers rebelled. They quit in droves, unable to accustom their bodies to the new place of the age. Since then, however, the adaptation has been passed down: we've all inherited it to some degree, so that we plug right into joystick and remotes, to repetitive motions of hundred kinds. (Eugenides, 2002, p. 95)

Furthermore, *Middlesex* re-recognizes the oneness of the entire human species and, at the same time, it preserves the unity in diversity. *Middlesex's* transcendental consciousness rises above the religious doctrines, political ideologies, and any other kind of dogmatic thinking/way of living. Eugenides's novel, to use Toni Morrison's term from her 1987 novel *Beloved*, involves "rememory."¹⁸ It means that *Middlesex* remembers memory. Here it happens in a transformative form of the modern epic, subtly depicting the gene which has been

¹⁸ As Ashraf H. A. Rushdy elaborates: "Morrison's 'rememory' is a nice addition to the vocabularies of both psychology and narratology—psychology because anamnesis becomes accessible to rediscovery as well as discovery, narratology because the word suggests the process by which narrative worlds are increations as much as re-creations, as much remimesis as mimesis" (1990, p. 303).

passed down through three generations of the Stephanides family, and within a context of rememory, “the concept of mental recollection, both anamnesis and construction, that is never only personal but always interpersonal” (Rushdy, 1990, p. 304). Through Cal’s personal and family history and the historical ontology, *Middlesex* narrativizes the unrepresentable stream of time, and then the stream of one’s own and other people’s consciousness.

The narrator says his story begins in 1922, when “there were concerns about the flow of oil,” and it ends in 1975, when “dwindling oil supplies again had people worried” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 498). In 1922, Cal’s grandparents on the paternal side emigrated from Greece and immigrated to the U.S. They wanted to create a new life in America, this time as a husband and a wife, and to erase their previous life of a brother and a sister in their homeland. However, Cal’s story develops in his quest for self-discovery, biding the time of two hundred and fifty years to trace the mutated gene that had lain buried in his family bloodline and started the chain of events that led to him and his self-reflection, not in America or Greece, but in Germany—in Berlin¹⁹, to be more precise. Paradoxically, Cal pursues his own (American) dream of happiness far away from the U.S. Since he has been trying to forget his body by keeping it in motion, he has been an employee of the U.S. State Department for most of his adult life. The life of a traveler was perfect for him because he had never been in one place long enough to form a solid attachment to anyone. In Berlin, however, he stops moving. There, he finds his first and, at the same time, possibly the last stop²⁰ in his pursuit of happiness and the recognition of his selfhood, all of which is embodied in his love with Julie Kikuchi, a Japanese-American girl with a boyish body. She is a photographer whose perception of beauty is “different.” As she perceives it, beauty is always freakish. She does not mind that Cal has a different anatomy from other men (or women?). As she obviously sees his body as beautiful, she helps him to assimilate his own body. In this way, by accepting his own body, Cal re-creates himself backwards in the act of writing. Thus, he recaps that

Sourmelina Zizmo (née Papadiamandopoulos) wasn’t only my first cousin twice removed. She was also my grandmother. My father was his own mother’s (and father’s) nephew. In addition to being my grandparents, Desdemona and Lefty were my great-aunt and -uncle. My parents would be my second cousins once removed and Chapter Eleven would be my third cousin as well as my brother. [...] In honor of Miss Barrie, my eight-grade Latin teacher, I’d like to call attention to

¹⁹ “Within the deterministic constraints of the discourse of the body, Cal exists in an ambiguous space of estrangement and fluidity, which Eugenides makes rather pat by placing him in Berlin, the ‘once divided city’” (Shostak, 2008, p. 410).

²⁰ Symbolically, “The Last Stop” is also the title of the last chapter of the novel.

the quotation [...]: ex ovo Omnia. [...] I hear her ask. "Infants? Can any of you translate this little snippet and give its provenance?"

I raise my hand.

"Calliope, our muse, will start us off."

"It's from Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. The story of creation."

"Stunning. And can you render it into English for us?"

"Everything comes out of an egg."

"Did you hear that, infants? This classroom, your bright faces, even dear old Cicero on my desk – they all came out of an egg." (Eugenides, 2002, p. 198)

The novel is structured as Cal(liope)'s personal memoir. It also refers to the plurality of history, meaning that history is not a single story. The personal (hi)story of *Middlesex* is thus a tapestry of the neglected, silenced, and/or hidden human (hi)stories woven together to better understand the human condition, including both individual and collective memory, all of which makes it a deeply human book. One of the important themes of the novel concerns the dichotomy of predestination and *free will*. Unlike both the Old and New Testament's allusions to God as Predestinator, a human plays God throughout the history of *Middlesex*. It means that a human has eliminated God, and everyone has been predestined according to the needs of society. In contrast to this, a new type of human being in a brave new world of *Middlesex* conveys a sense of disillusionment based on a deep insight into human nature and expresses *free will*. In brief, Cal's parents, Tessie and Milton Stephanides, wanted their second child to be a daughter because they already had a son, symbolically named Chapter Eleven²¹. Hence, they followed certain theories of conception in a formulaic way in order to predestine and predetermine the sex of a child. Even though they were convinced that their experiment was successful when the baby was born, they got an intersex child. Their family doctor did not notice the real sex of the child and declared it female. Thus, Calliope was born and raised as a girl. In her teenage years, Calliope, however, discovered that she was not a girl like other girls. The truth was discovered by an emergency physician when Callie was fourteen and accidentally got injured by a tractor. In shock, her parents took her to the Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Clinic in New York. While waiting in the Reading Room of the New York Public Library for her parents to come back from an appointment with her doctor, she, "still officially Calliope" (Eugenides, 2002, p. 429), decides to look herself up in the Webster's dictionary. Following the trail of definitions related to her identity on the dictionary's pages "gilded like the Bible's" (Eugenides, 2002, p.

²¹ Chapter 11 is a chapter of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code, which permits reorganization under the bankruptcy laws of the U.S.

430), she reaches the entry for “hermaphrodite” and its synonym “monster” as the final discovery of her identity. It

was a book that contained the collected knowledge of the past while giving evidence of present social conditions. [...] The synonym was official, authoritative; it was the verdict that the culture gave on a person like her. Monster. That was what she was. That was what dr. Luce and his colleagues had been saying. (Eugenides, 2002, p. 431)

Having learnt about her natural gender while facing the possibility of sex reassignment surgery, Callie decides to run away from her family and doctors. She assumes a male cultural identity as Cal yet chooses not to change the gender identity of intersex. Since Cal has always liked girls, meaning that he equally liked girls when he “*was a girl*” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 513), and his sexual anatomy is typically male or masculine in appearance with untypical male or female genitals, both his choices are natural. That is who he is. That is the inadvertent harmony of his new normality the society has yet to accept together with “other” normalities.

Middlesex is thus a new book of knowledge of humanity and its metamorphoses. It investigates the relations between the mind and the body and traces the transformations of humanity. Correspondingly, *Middlesex* is, metaphorically speaking, the “gender” of humanity. It means that *Middlesex* represents the combined identities of humanity, elaborating that “[s]ex is biological. Gender is cultural” (Eugenides 2002, p. 489). *Middlesex* collects knowledge about humanity in all its complexity, pointing out that all typical men and women have the same sex hormones, just in different proportions; and there is a third gender of intersex people. The novel not only chronicles an illuminating and transcendent story about a hermaphrodite but depicts other traces of “the third gender”. There are, for example, lesbians, such as Cal’s grandmother/cousin Sourmelina, and then the other people he meets on his modern epic journey in a quest for identity and self-definition. Some of them are Carmen, a pre-operation male-to-female transsexual, and Zora, a hermaphrodite opposite to Cal. Zora’s sexual anatomy is typically female or feminine in appearance with male genitals. She is the first person like him he has ever seen, the first hermaphrodite he has ever met. Cal thinks of “Zora Khyber as an early pioneer, a sort of John Baptist crying in the wilderness” and “that wilderness was America, even the globe itself” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 448) back in 1974, when he meets her in San Francisco, America’s first gay city and “the homosexual *Hauptstadt*” (Eugenides, 2002, p. 469).

To sum up, *Middlesex* is a deeply moving portrait of a human. Since genetics function as “the point of contact between the novel of immigration and

the novel of intersexuality” (Shostak, 2008, p. 389), the issues of nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, and sex, among others, intertwine in *Middlesex*. It provides a more human vision of the world, transcending binary thinking. The novel’s *third space* goes beyond historical perspectives of freedom and introduces a *new* freedom, which is much freer. *Middlesex* challenges the fixity of the space of the human body and the spatiality of a human being, and then reads them anew. A new reading examines the question about the meaning of being human, but it does not offer a final answer simply because the notion of normality can never be a single story.

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PREVAZILAŽENJE BINARNOGA: GLEDIŠTA, GLASOVI, LJUDI I MJESTA U ROMANU *MIDDLESEX* JEFFREYA EUGENIDESA

Sažetak

Ovim radom se nastoje istražiti romaneskni pogledi, glasovi, ljudi i mjesta *Middlesexa*, romana Jeffreya Eugenidesa, objavljenog 2002. godine, a kojima se višestruko i mnogostrano prevazilaze i nadilaze tradicionalne binarne paradigme i isto takvo mišljenje. U centru pažnje rada se nalaze pogledi, glas(ovi) i prostor(nost) naratora/naratorice i protagoniste/protagonistkinje, rođenog/rođene kao djevojčica i imenovanog/imenovane kao Calliope Stephanides, koji/koja se u sadašnjosti društveno identificira kao odrasli muškarac Cal, a koji je, zapravo, hermafrodit. Knjiga je i *Bildungsroman* i porodična saga, koja je ispričana i iz vanjske i iz unutrašnje perspektive. Priča o evoluciji Calliope u Cala je, istovremeno, odiseja emigracije njegovih ili njenih ili *njihovih* – što označava ili jedninu ili nebinarnost – grčkih bake i djeda, iz današnje Turske u SAD. Njom se prate i istražuju životi tri generacije porodice Stephanides. Njihove linije priča, poput gena, međusobno djeluju jedna na drugu da bi stvorile jedno tijelo *Middlesexa*. Kako se time naznačava, geni *Middlesexa*, metaforički rečeno, jesu i američki i grčki. Roman istražuje kako ljudsko tijelo, tako i tijelo ljudskog roda, uključujući i anatomiju propasti Detroita (kao i društvenu historiju SAD), kako bi artikulirao prošlost, identificirao sadašnjost i usmjerio se na budućnost. Također, roman istražuje estetiku normalnosti, koja, kako to *Middlesex* elaborira, nikada ne može biti isključivo jedna jedina priča. U radu se analizira sve navedeno, kao i drugi srodni elementi romana, kako bi se ukazalo na koje sve načine *Middlesex* Jeffreya Eugenidesa prevazilazi višestruke tradicionalne binarnosti.

Ključne riječi: Middlesex, Jeffrey Eugenides, hermafrodit, estetika normalnosti, prevazilaženje binarnoga