

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

In life's journey as a human, identity is the most essential component of life, one of which is gender identity. As stated by Rowland and Incrocci (2006), gender identity refers to psychological or biological characteristics associated with males and females. However, at this time, we find many gender disorders that happen in humans, one of which we may have heard is intersex. Intersex is a phenomenon experienced by individuals born with two sexes. This commonly occurs because of genetic abnormalities due to incompatibility between chromosomes. This condition can cause significant confusion and discomfort for intersex individuals, frequently leading to gender dysphoria because of their physical traits not aligning with either the male or female categories.

According to Yarhouse (2015), gender dysphoria is a condition where an individual experiences a gender identity discrepancy or distress that does not match the sex assigned at birth (p.19). Individuals who experience gender dysphoria usually feel that their bodies do not reflect the gender identity they feel, which makes them feel anxious and dissatisfied with that identity. People who experience this condition often feel discomfort between how the environment sees them and how they see themselves. For example, someone who was born female but does not feel that way, such as an individual born with an intersex condition. Usually, those who are born with this condition not only feel dissatisfied with their physical appearance but also experience more internal conflicts, one of which is emotional imbalance.



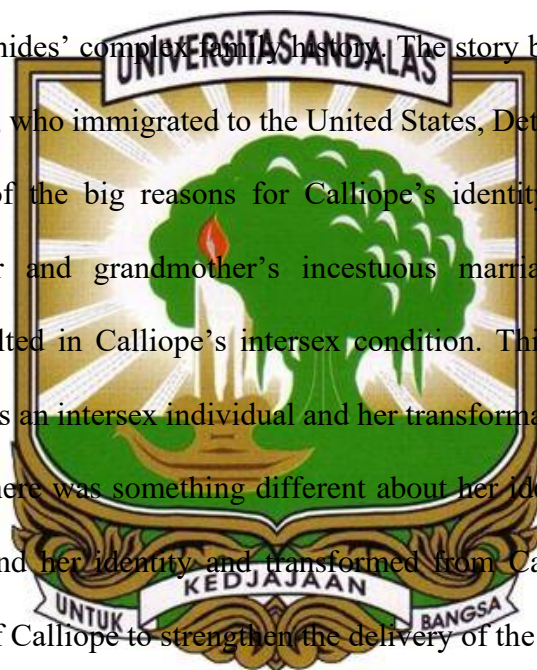
In addition, individuals who experience this often face emotional imbalance and self-acceptance in the end. This imbalance refers to a state where the individual feels excessive emotions, confusion about their condition, and anxiety and also isolates themselves. This is often caused by several factors, including social factors and factors from within themselves. If the individual has established stable emotions, then self-acceptance will emerge. Self-acceptance is an essential aspect because it will eliminate internal conflict. This journey is often related to freeing oneself from social and community expectations and finding peace with a new identity. So, emotional imbalance and self-acceptance are essential in helping inner peace. To explore this issue, literary works often play an important role in studying the problem, including *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides.

Jeffrey Kent Eugenides is an American novelist and short-story writer. He was born on March 8, 1960, in Detroit, Michigan. Eugenides is famous for his works, such as *The Marriage Plot* and *The Virgin Suicide*, and the most famous is *Middlesex*, which raises the theme of gender dysphoria. *Middlesex* is a fiction novel written by Jeffrey Eugenides in 2002, and it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2003. Besides that, this novel was also included in Oprah's Book Club list in the same year. This novel was inspired by *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite*.

The choice of this topic and novel is based on my interest and fascination with how to understand the depiction of gender dysphoria in a literary work. This novel not only explores the issue of gender dysphoria but also describes how an intersex individual experiences various challenges both from outside and inside that cause confusion and dilemma. I am interested in exploring how this experience is conveyed in a literary work

through how the elements in the literary work can help and reveal more deeply about what is experienced by a character who experiences a condition as an intersex individual.

Middlesex is a groundbreaking novel that employs the journey of an intersex individual. Calliope Stephanides, the main character, experienced an intersexual condition, later known as Cal. Calliope was born to Milton and Tessi Stephanides as a woman named Calliope Helen Stephanides. Calliope's condition as an intersex effectively depicts the challenges of the gender identity crisis linked with Calliope's transformation into Cal. The story starts with Stephanides' complex family history. The story begins with the journey of Calliope's grandparents, who immigrated to the United States, Detroit, Michigan. Calliope's grandparents are one of the big reasons for Calliope's identity journey as an intersex individual. Grandfather and grandmother's incestuous marriage caused chromosome differences, which resulted in Calliope's intersex condition. This novel clearly describes Calliope's life journey as an intersex individual and her transformation. As the years passed, Calliope realized that there was something different about her identity. From that moment on, Calliope tried to find her identity and transformed from Calliope to Cal. Eugenides himself uses the story of Calliope to strengthen the delivery of the text's content.



In literary works, the author uses some elements to convey a message, determine the use of language, and enrich the text by creating layers of meaning. These elements can explore complex issues such as gender dysphoria and provide a richer understanding. Scholars have emphasized the author's skill in conveying a brilliant and summoning sense of freshness in the reader's perception through literary devices in their work. In literary devices, the author uses elements like imagery, symbols, tone, etc. Some literary devices, such as irony, paradox, and ambiguity, are often used in one unit because these three elements

are interrelated. According to Tyson (2006), new critics appreciate irony, ambiguity, and paradox in literary texts, which serve the unifying purpose of supporting the text's central theme (p. 260). Literary work can be analyzed by using tension (irony, paradox, ambiguity), symbolism, and tone in new criticism

Tension is a condition where a sentence creates two contradictory things based on paradox, irony, and ambiguity. Guerin et al. (2006) stated that, the aspect of formalist criticism might be called tension, the resolution of opposites, often in irony, paradox, and ambiguity (p. 110). Paradox is a statement that is opposite but has truth in it. Meanwhile, irony is a situation where there is a discrepancy between the author's intention and what they say. On the other hand, ambiguity is a literary device that authors usually use to provide several interpretations depending on how readers understand the sentence. Symbolism represents an idea or theme using characters, elements, and objects. At the same time, the tone is the author's attitude toward the work, usually reflected through word choice and language style. Literary works often play an important role in exploring this issue, including *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides.



In this study, the writer uses Cleanth Brooks's new criticism theory to examine the gender dysphoria of Calliope to Cal through the forms of irony, paradox, ambiguity, symbolism, and tone in Jeffrey Eugenides's novel *Middlesex*. The writer believes that using this theory can prove and provide an understanding of how these elements play an essential role in conveying the meaning of complex stories in a literary work. Based on the explanation above, the writer entitled this study, "Emotional Imbalance and Self-Acceptance as the Impacts of Gender Dysphoria in *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides: A New Critical Study."

1.2 Identification of the problems

In this research, the writer analyses the *Middlesex* novel by Jeffrey Eugenides. The *Middlesex* tells the story of an intersexual or hermaphrodite individual experienced by the main character, Calliope or Cal. Calliope experiences where she is confused about her gender identity. She went through a situation where her physical appearance did not match either gender category. The condition experienced by Calliope is not solely due to gender abnormalities; however, behind all that, some factors make her experience the intersexual condition.

This analysis raises the issue of gender dysphoria, which causes an inner conflict felt by the main character due to the incongruity or conflicting feelings between his biological identity and his body. The tension he experiences creates an emotional imbalance that continues throughout the story. However, this inner turmoil also leads Cal to a process of self-acceptance. The problem shown in this study is how gender dysphoria can have a significant impact on Cal's life. The problem emphasized in this study is that gender dysphoria is also depicted through emotional imbalance and self-acceptance, which aims to show how it is represented in literary works.



1.3 Review of Related Literatures

Several studies have been done regarding this topic in literary works. Many researchers are interested in this matter to gain an understanding of the development of intersexual people. The writer found some articles and undergraduate theses related to the issue of intersex.

First, a published article written by Robiatul Husna (2018) entitled “Trapped in The Betweenness: “The Narration of Gender, Sex, and Sexuality in Jeffrey Eugenides’

Middlesex”. This article discusses how the representation of gender and sexuality is depicted in the *Middlesex* novel, influenced by some cultural background. This article uses the theory of gender performativity developed by Judith Butler to explore how the character Calliope struggles to find her gender identity and sexuality amid a society and culture that limits it. The primary focus of this research is how the novel depicts issues regarding incest, lesbian individuals, and intersexuality.

The findings of the author of the research are divided into three forms. First, incestuous in the heterosexual matrix: taboo in disguise. This part explains the incest narrative in the *Middlesex* novel, which is depicted through the relationship between Lefty and Desdemona, although, according to American society's norms, it is considered taboo. However, besides that, their representation as a heterosexual couple who hide their true identities makes their relationship still acceptable. This representation emphasizes that heterosexual norms can cover up the incest taboo as long as the main norms are met. Second, lesbian: forever forbidden desires. Unlike incest, the lesbian narrative in this novel is considered something that violates norms and must remain hidden because the dominant heterosexual norm believes that relationships between women are shameful. Lesbians are still constructed as a marginal orientation and must be adjusted to heterosexual norms. Third, intersex: between resistance and subservience. This section shows efforts to resist, but on the one hand, must also submit to existing norms. This narrative shows that although there are efforts to oppose gender dichotomies, in reality, intersex individuals must adjust to existing categories.



This article provides an understanding of the strain and confusion experienced by the main character, especially in a society full of norms. In my opinion, this analysis offers a critical analysis of gender representations of social norms. Also, it shows how the narrative in the novel positions different identities as deviations that must be adjusted to social standards. It also provides a broad and strong perspective on how a societal environment can force individuals to follow heterosexual norms, which follow the *Middlesex* narrative. This makes an essential contribution to complex gender identity, specifically for intersex people.

Second an article written by Irena Sirhan and Mamik Tri Wedawati (2016) entitled “Cal/Calliope’s Undoing Gender in Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex*”. This article provides an analysis of the main character's gender identity through Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. This study shows how Cal/Calliope, as an intersex individual, experiences a process of rejection based on social norms. This article emphasizes the concept of gender as a social construct that is not absolute and can change.

Based on this study, two points or findings are emphasized. First, Calliope as a female, this explains that she has a complex gender identity and finally experiences a gender performative process produced by social and even cultural construction, because the name Calliope itself is associated with women. Calliope, as a female, emphasizes that the identity that is attached to her is not only dependent on biological traits but also on cultural aspects. Second, Cal, as a male, in this process, illustrates that gender is something that can be chosen and is not attached. Cal also begins to show masculinity performance as part of liberation and self-discovery, which emphasizes that gender is a social construct that can be changed, which is influenced by social and gender performativity. In the end, Cal undoing gender



construction imposed by society and maintains the intersex condition as a form of rejection of the norm.

So, I think the transformation carried out by Calliope describes a journey where the situation she experiences is very complex because this situation is not only about sex, gender, and individuality, but there is an important role where social construction, family expectations, also play a role in Calliope's case. Social roles and family influence Calliope in understanding gender, where expectations from both aspects shape her life journey. This article is interesting because it successfully examines in detail the concept of gender as a social construct that can be changed, and is not limited to traditional values.

Amutahavalli and Rajkumar (2022) in their published article entitled "Analysis of Hermaphroditism in Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*". This article comprehensively discusses hermaphroditism and gender identity, exploring the journey of self-discovery related to the conditions experienced by the main character, which is influenced by social factors and not only biological factors through psychosocial development by Erikson. This article has two findings, the first is the anxiety of hermaphroditism experienced by Cal, which comes from his experience of not knowing about his condition. The anxiety experienced by Calliope as a hermaphrodite individual is the uncertainty of her identity because she feels there is no compability between the two genders. However, on the one hand, he feels something is different from the social norm, which causes the fear that hits him. In addition, he also experiences a fear of social acceptance. Therefore, she often fakes anything related to herself. Second is self-realization, which is related to self-awareness and starting to accept and understand one's unique identity.



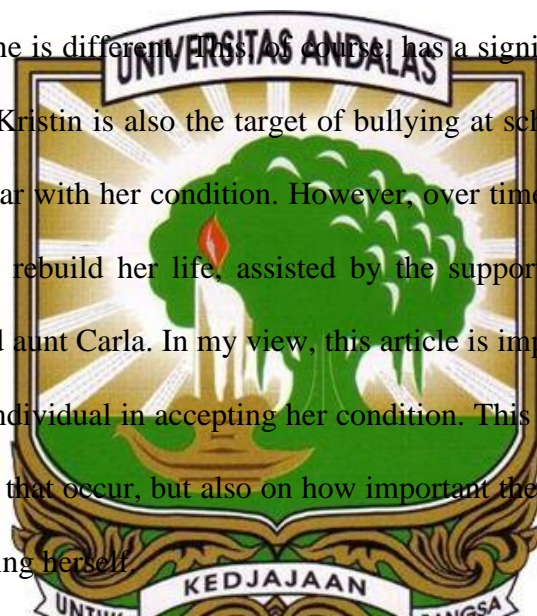
It shows that gender is not always black and white but rather complex. So, it can be concluded that this analysis explores the anxiety of a hermaphrodite person and their self-realization through psychosocial theory. I think this article provides an understanding of the hermaphrodite theme by exploring the main character's journey in understanding herself and self-acceptance. Overall, this article enriches the understanding of gender fluidity and the diversity of gender identities.

The following literature review is an article by Neha Gangwani (2022) entitled “Tracing Gender Dysphoria in the Novel *Maduresa* by Jeffrey Eugenides”. This article discusses the internal struggle and psychological trauma experienced by Calliope in dealing with the blurring of her gender identity. So, this analysis only focuses on the depiction of how Calliope, who has not been able to accept herself as intersex. This article has the same theme and object as what I am researching, but it uses queer and gender performativity by Judith Butler. However, this study is very different from my research. My research focuses on elements such as irony, paradox, ambiguity, symbolism, and tone to reveal the issue of gender dysphoria, where the narratives in the novel are the source of research using the theory of new criticism. My research also touches on emotional imbalance and self-acceptance as the impacts of gender dysphoria, strengthening my analysis.

The following article by Ratna Asmarani (2023) entitled “The Struggle to Accept Unique Gender Identity in The Life of an Intersex Person in *None of the above* by I.W. Gregorio. This article focuses on the discussion of Kristin's life journey as an intersex person, specifically AIS. This study uses feminist literary criticism theory to reveal the condition. It highlights the difficulties faced by Kristin, such as social stigma, trauma, and bullying.

However, it also emphasizes the important role of her family and friends in the process of self-acceptance.

These are the findings of this study. First is Kristin before the diagnosis, which gives a picture of Kristin, who is a happy and cheerful student who is also surrounded by people who love her. Second is Kristin's gynaecological condition, which is a condition where she does not have a uterus, but she has hidden testicles, which causes the most significant trauma for her. This condition also causes emotional and psychological challenges because she has to accept the fact that she is different. This, of course, has a significant impact on Kristin's social life. In addition, Kristin is also the target of bullying at school because of the social stigma that is not familiar with her condition. However, over time, she began to accept her condition and began to rebuild her life, assisted by the support of those closest to her, especially her father and aunt Carla. In my view, this article is important in highlighting the journey of an intersex individual in accepting her condition. This research not only focuses on the social challenges that occur, but also on how important the environment and support are for Kristin in accepting herself.



The following review is of Roshan and Xu Wen's article (2023) "(Trans) Gendering Transition and Identity Struggle in *The Danish Girl* and *Nevada*". This article explores transgender women, their transition, and their identity crisis as individuals. This study analyzes two main characters in a different novel, *The Danish Girl* and *Nevada*. These novels are described as gender transformation from the contemporary view. This analysis uses sociological and anthropological methodology to explore the transgender characteristics of the main characters of these two novels, Lili Elbe and Maria.

This article broadly discusses how gender transition involves physical changes and social and linguistic identity struggles. The condition they experience is not only about physical transformation but also a complex struggle with their environments. The challenges they faced within social spheres are a reflection of how transgender individuals experience struggle and a confusing self-identity. In addition, the author of this research also emphasized that social recognition is critical in recognizing the existence of transgender people. In this analysis, it was found that the social expectations of transgender people make them unhappy and uncomfortable because of social pressure. I think this article highlights the transgender experience developed through social and linguistic means that aim to emphasize transgender rights and recognition of their existence.

Rizkian Hendra Ardianto (2015) in his article entitled “New Criticism and Metonymy as A Device to Determine Gothic Genre in Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*”. This study discusses how the gothic genre is depicted in Allan Poe’s novel entitled *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and how to identify or categorize the literary work into the gothic genre category through the concept of new criticism. The theory used is new criticism put forward by John Ransom and supported by T.S. Elliot and I.A. Richards. This study focuses on gothic elements, especially metonymy, using a semiotic approach. The author identifies various typical gothic elements with a mysterious atmosphere and a gripping atmosphere that contains curses or death. This study aims to understand how the gothic genre is depicted and determine whether this novel is gothic.

Overall, this study provides an understanding of how important it is to use theory critically. We should also enrich our understanding of various gothic elements that are useful

for identifying and building atmosphere in the story. This article is very informative because it provides useful insights into literary works, especially gothic elements.

The following review study is a published article by Rafmil Ramadhan (2012) entitled “The Portrayal of Woman’s Spirit in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Poem *The Mother’s Charge*: A New Criticism Analysis”. This analysis is fascinating because we can find out how a woman writes her ideas and feelings through poems, short stories, and others, and the woman is Charlotte Perkins. *The Mother’s Charge* is a work written by Perkins in the early 20th century. Through this novel, Perkins tried to express her feelings about women’s spirit in everything they do. The theory used by the author in examining the work is the new criticism theory, so this focus is only on the text itself. This analysis also uses a close reading method. From this analysis, several findings, including figurative language, symbols, and imagery in the novel, develop the theme of women’s spirit. Through these elements, the author can describe women’s spirit because it is depicted through responsibility and in every situation, to achieve something positive.

Last, the article from Puspita Sari (2018) entitled “Representation of Racial Discrimination: New Criticism Analysis in Ralph Ellison’s *The Black Ball*”. This article discusses a short story that discusses the theme of identity and racial discrimination, specifically regarding the black race, which is depicted through a black boy. This analysis uses qualitative research to focus more on the narrative in the text that describes discrimination. The author uses new criticism theory, mainly formal elements, to explore and dig into the theme of identity and racial discrimination. The formal elements used are symbols, similes, metaphors, and images to work together to convey and develop the intent and theme that the author wants to convey, and are easily understood by the readers.

As listed above, some researchers have conducted previous analyses and studies related to the *Middlesex* novel, new criticism theory, and issues related to gender identity. However, there is no *Middlesex* analysis that uses new criticism; it primarily uses gender performativity and psychological theory. Therefore, this analysis will explore gender dysphoria through new criticism by focusing on the elements in new criticism. This analysis will also touch on emotional imbalance and self-acceptance.

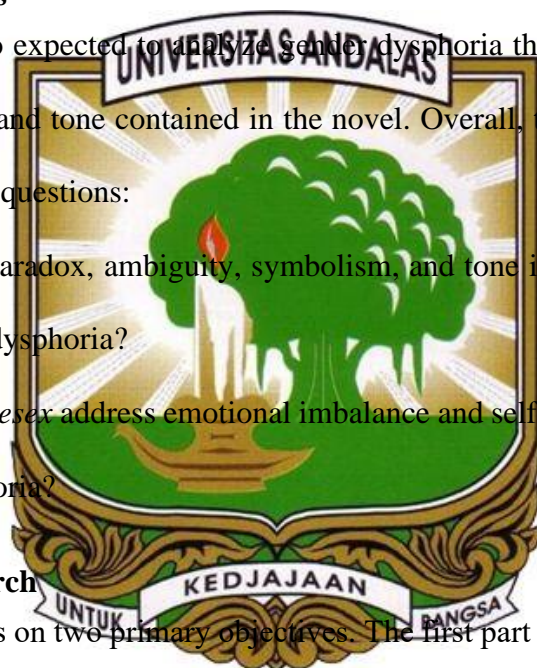
1.4 Research Questions

This research is also expected to analyze gender dysphoria through the irony, paradox, ambiguity, symbolism, and tone contained in the novel. Overall, this research is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. How do irony, paradox, ambiguity, symbolism, and tone in *Middlesex* highlight the issue of gender dysphoria?
2. How does *Middlesex* address emotional imbalance and self-acceptance in the context of gender dysphoria?

1.5 Scope of the Research

This study will focus on two primary objectives. The first part is how this novel's author examines and employs elements such as paradox, irony, ambiguity, symbolism, and tone to explain the profound meaning of its narrative. These elements are analyzed to explain how each aspect contributes to providing an understanding of the text and its overall meaning. The second is to investigate how *Middlesex* depicts emotional imbalance and also self-acceptance in the context of gender dysphoria, which is the theme of this study. So, this part will show how the main character, who initially has inner turmoil, is finally achieving self-



acceptance. By combining these two important aspects, this study will create a complete unity.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to explore how Jeffrey Eugenides creates deep meaning through literary elements in the themes raised. These elements serve to strengthen the themes in the novel. In addition, this study also explores the issue of emotional imbalance and self-acceptance experienced by the main character. Thus, this study is expected to provide an understanding of gender dysphoria. Therefore, this study will focus on elements in the text and contribute to a deeper understanding.

1. Analyze, identify, and describe irony, paradox, ambiguity, symbolism, and tone in the novel *Middlesex* by doing a close reading.
2. To examine how *Middlesex* addresses the issues of emotional imbalance and self-acceptance in the context of gender dysphoria.

This research is expected to fulfill the objectives above, such as understanding new criticism theory, literary devices, the text, and organic unity. The last aim is to provide an outcome of this study.

