

Different External Interference Directly Leads to Different Endings for Transgenders

Xiang Li¹

¹ Ningbo Childhood Education College, Ningbo, China

Correspondence: Xiang Li, Ningbo Childhood Education College, Ningbo, China.

doi:10.56397/SSSH.2024.11.05

Abstract

Based on Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, this paper reveals that the nature of gender is an idealized imitation and expression, which breaks the original binary opposition between heterosexuality and sexual minorities and analyzes the impact of symbolic society's views of such imitative behavior as an inherent attribute of gender on sexual minorities. The protagonists in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Alain Berliner's movie *My Life in Pink* both reflect the living conditions of transgenders in real society. They face the same dilemma but have completely different endings. Due to the different reactions of the external environment and people around them, the psychological changes and personality shaping of the two transgenders are also totally different, Gregor died tragically, but Ludovic was eventually accepted by society. Therefore, breaking the stereotyped thoughts of gender by combining gender performativity theory, this paper makes a comparative analysis of the influence from external interference on the personality shaping of transgenders in the two genres, calling for a more open and inclusive social environment.

Keywords: gender performativity, transgender, external interference, the symbolic, *Metamorphosis*, *My Life in Pink*

1. Introduction

According to Judith Butler's theory, symbolic society has always forced heterosexuality to set itself as the origin of all sexualities, while homosexuality and other minority sexual orientations are regarded as imitations of heterosexuality. But in fact, heterosexuality is a constant panic imitation of self-naturalized idealization, which sets itself as the origin and foundation. Also, gender is also a kind of imitation and performance of idealization. But the symbolic society regards this kind of imitation behavior as the inherent property of gender, for example, pants belong to men and dresses belong to women (Butler 955-961), and those who don't meet this rule are regarded as the heterogeneous and will be excluded by the world, which leads to a series of results. The protagonists of *The Metamorphosis* and Alain Berliner's movie *My Life in Pink* (Alain Berliner 1997) can both be seen as transgenders. Both stories begin when others discover their "abnormality". Because of the different reactions shown by others around them, transgenders themselves have also experienced a process of psychological changes and entanglements. The different reactions given to the two protagonists also directly led to the different endings of them. Gregor died of hunger and loneliness, but Ludovic (Georges Du Fresne) was finally accepted by society. So, it's obvious that the attitude of others is very important to transgenders. Then, I will combine these two works for a detailed analysis.

2. Both Gregor and Ludovic Belong to Transgenders

Transgender refers to individuals whose self-gender cognition is different from the biological sex assigned at birth. Due to the rigid gender recognition rules in society and the restrictions of legal policies in the current symbolic order, transgenders, a minority group, are currently widely discriminated in society ("Transgender"

2022). The protagonists of these two works, Gregor and Ludovic, articulate their transgender identities in subtle and overt forms respectively.

Kafka uses exaggerated techniques to change Gregor from a human form into a monstrous vermin form. Although the gender identity issue isn't explicitly pointed out in the novel, Gregor has the appearance of a vermin but recognizes himself as a human being in his mental field. This situation is consistent with the conflicting biological sex and self-identity of transgenders, so Gregor's insect appearance can be regarded as a male biological sex, and his self-identity as a human can be regarded as a female psychological gender identity. Gregor himself doesn't realize that either gender was an imitation of kinds of idealization, so when he firstly became aware of this inconsistency, he saw it all as an illusion that would soon disappear. He believed that consistent gender cognition is the natural and real state and said, "the utter stillness would bring a return of the real, true, ordinary state of affairs" (Kafka 33). He regards his own situation as different from others in his mind. At this time, he himself has fallen into a misunderstanding from the beginning, which also led to the fallacy of his subsequent behavior.

Ludovic's transgender characteristics are more obvious. His biological sex is male, but his self-gender identity is female. He likes to have long hair, wear skirts and put on make-up, which is always regarded as the unique wealth of female gender by the symbolic society, so Ludovic's behavior is also a performance of idealized female identity. At the same time, he also reflects the phenomenon that secular society enforces heterosexuality as the origin of other sexual orientations. Ludovic said that he wanted to marry a male classmate Jerome (Julien Riviere) because of pure love, and his mother told him that "boys don't marry other boys" (Michèle Laroque), so Ludo has always said that he isn't a boy and thinks that he can marry Jerome after he becomes a girl in the future. He thinks God gave him one less X chromosome, he says "my x for a girl fell in the trash, I got a y instead. A scientific error" (Georges Du Fresne), "but god'll fix it. He'll send me my x, and we can get married" (Georges Du Fresne). But in fact, every sexual orientation is equal, not only the opposite gender can love each other. But social stereotypes regard heterosexuality as the absolute truth and reject other sexual orientations, which directly leads to the tragedy of the relationship between Ludovic and Jerome.

3. Reactions from the Outside World Will Affect Transgender's Process of Individual Psychological Gender Cognition

When the transgender phenomenon is known to the outside world because of its rareness, the outside will definitely react to it to varying degrees. Firstly, such reactions will to a certain extent make transgender individuals firmer in their gender identity. Before transgender actions, Gregor was just a person who "thinks of nothing but the business" (Kafka 35). The meaning of Gregor's existence is to meet the requirements of the symbolic society, to work with dignity, and to bring a better life to his family. His mind and body revolved around the family members, and there was no self-awareness. But after he became an insect, after being treated differently by his family, he awakened his self-awareness instead. When his mother and sister moved the furniture in his room, he felt that they were taking away everything he loved. In order to protect the portrait on the wall from being taken away, he pressed his body tightly against it, unwilling to let the painting be taken away. Since then, he has learned how to fight for himself and has become more aware of his self-identity as a human being. It can be said that external interference has made him more convinced of his inner female gender identity. At the same time, although Ludovic showed a tendency towards female gender, he wasn't totally true about that. He asked his sister "Am I a boy or girl?" (Georges Du Fresne), at that time his psychological gender identity isn't firm. But after he tried to put away the dolls, began to imitate the boy's shooting action, and tried the boy's favorite football game, he firmly believed in his heart that he is a girl, and he said, "I don't want to change" (Georges Du Fresne), "it's not best for me" (Georges Du Fresne) to his family. It can be seen that external intervention will have a certain positive impact on gender identity, making the originally wavering psychological self-gender identity firmer.

However, such a positive effect itself is weak and unstable. After an individual realizes that his psychological sex is different from his biological sex, it will have a greater negative impact on himself due to the different treatment from the outside world. Because no individual can live without the symbolic world, which is often the source of individuals' thoughts and energy, and individuals always hope to be accepted by society in their hearts. For example, when Gregor's relatives were about to take measures to find a locksmith to unlock his room, Gregor was delighted, "he felt drawn back into the sphere of humanity" (Kafka 38). But when he found that the society disgusted and rejected him, his self-confidence was greatly destroyed, and he began to feel inferior and sensitive, unwilling to endure the emptiness of the room, hiding under the narrow sofa all the time, covering himself with a sheet for her sister can't see him. Ludovic also experienced the same psychological suppression. At first, he appeared in front of everyone wearing a skirt with confidence, but after a series of exclusion and ridicule, his gradually lost his smile, and even thought about committing suicide in the refrigerator. It can be seen that the general rejection from the outside world will have a great impact on the transgender's character and

mood.

And this effect can even cause them to give up their psychological gender identity, which is different from their biological ones. After Gregor became an insect, his family treated him like an insect, and Gregor himself gradually gave up his living habits as a human, and he began to prefer insect food, “he had no palate for the items of fresh food” (Kafka 46), at the same time, he wasn’t used to human houses with furniture, but hoped to live in a cave-like place where he could crawl easily. At that time, his psychology was close to that of an insect, which shows that the female gender of his psychological gender identity has gradually dissipated, and gradually merged with the biological male gender. Although he was briefly aroused by his sister’s violin sound (female self-gender identity), “he felt as if the way to the unknown nourishment he longed for was being revealed” (Kafka 66), it was brutally broken by the external world, he was driven back to the small dark room, which means the complete disappearance of female self-gender recognition. There’s a similar situation for Ludovic. He originally voluntarily wanted to wear a dress, but after experiencing the anger of his family, the ridicule of his classmates and the expulsion from the school, Ludovic began to fear wearing a dress. When Christina (Raphaelle Santini) asked him to wear a dress, he was evading and rejecting, which means he began to evade his own psychological perception of the female gender. And this is the more serious negative impact brought about by external reactions.

4. Different External Reactions Will Directly Bring Different Results to Transgender

Whether it’s the general social environment, strangers in the crowd, or relatives and friends around transgenders, external reactions will have the most direct impact on the final outcome of transgenders. Although both Gregor and Ludovic have experienced similar rejection and torture, Ludovic had friends who were tolerant and open at the end of the film, and his family members also accepted his existence. Therefore, compared to Gregor dying miserably in a dark room alone, Ludovic had a better ending.

Firstly, the general social environment isn’t very accepting of transgenders, so it’s very difficult for transgenders to survive. Gregor’s manager chose to flee the scene directly after seeing his insect form and left no chance for Gregor to explain; at the same time, when the tenants who rented a room in Gregor’s house saw Gregor’s insect form, the first reaction was to check out. Therefore, the public’s first reaction to transgender are extreme rejection and avoidance. This situation is similar to Ludovic. The Jerome family had a good relationship with the Ludovic family at the beginning. However, at that time, homosexuality was despised and rejected by society. In order to prevent his family from being rejected by society, Jerome’s father also began to stay away from the Ludovic family, who even fired Ludovic’s father as a boss. Meanwhile, Ludovic was petitioned by parents of 20 other children asking him to drop out of school, and “bent boys out” was written on the wall outside Ludovic’s home. Among them, Jerome is the most typical example of being influenced by this environment from innocence. At the beginning, he even showed the class his truck as a male symbol and Ludovic’s earrings as a female symbol. And he was willing to cooperate with Ludovic’s house-like wedding game, who didn’t exclude Ludo’s intimate contact. At that time, Jerome was in a natural state that didn’t regard heterosexuality as origin. But he was later influenced by his parents’ views, and even felt that playing with transgender like Ludovic would let him “go to hell” (Julien Riviere). This shows the profound influence of social customs on the masses. Jerome then alienated Ludovic, remained indifferent when Ludovic was being bullied, and felt repulsed by Ludovic’s close contact. It can be seen that a person’s beliefs will have a great impact on his behavior, and the social environment amplifies and incites certain emotions, making individuals who are originally equal and free also start to have ideological prejudice.

The impact of this kind of discrimination in the social environment can sometimes even affect the feelings of relatives towards transgenders, especially when it comes to the issue of financial resources for survival. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor’s father doesn’t care too much about Gregor, he cares more about what Gregor’s existence can bring. When Gregor wasn’t in insect form, he was generally accepted by the society, who could bring income to the family, and provide food, clothing, housing and transportation conditions for the family members. But when Gregor became an insect, Gregor was no longer his child in his father’s eyes, and the bond of family affection had been broken. At this time, Gregor completely became a waste like a parasite in his relatives’ eyes. His father was able to tolerate Gregor’s living alone in his room, choosing to ignore his presence. But when Gregor’s appearance threatened the source of income to support his life, his father’s attitude was completely different. When the manager ran away because he saw Gregor’s insect form, the father stomped his feet and took a stick to force Gregor to go back into the room. When the tenants chose to quit the lease because of Gregor’s existence, the father’s first reaction was to please the tenants instead of paying attention to Gregor’s status. The same situation also appeared in Ludovic’s parents. At the beginning, the mother was full of tolerance for Ludovic and said that “it’s natural, until the age of 7, we search for our identity” (Michèle Laroque). But his father, who bears the family expenses, was extra angry and stressed by Ludovic’s behavior. He was afraid that because of Ludovic’s behavior, he would be disliked by his superior, he was afraid of losing his job, which

means his family would lose their financial resources, so he couldn't tolerate Ludovic additionally. This is all due to the pressure of survival. Then, when Ludovic's father lost his job because of series of transgender incidents, his mother realized that her living conditions were seriously threatened. At this time, his mother's attitude changed dramatically. She even said to Ludovic that "it's all your fault! everything!" (Michèle Laroque). In this case, the general environment will impose a lot of invisible pressure on the relatives of transgenders, which will lead to changes in the attitude of relatives, and the family affection will even become invalid.

The younger siblings and mothers of the two transgender protagonists live under the oppression of the patriarchal power represented by the father, and their inaction also invisibly justifies many of the violence inflicted on the two transgenders. Gregor's father would stomp his feet and throw apples to murder Gregor's life. Although his mother tried to stop him, she finally agreed to all this violence silently. When Ludovic was beaten by boys in the locker room, his younger brothers stood by and no one helped him. Jean (Erik Cazals De Fabel) wanted to help but was stopped by Tom (Gregory Diallo). Violence against anyone should be prohibited, but violence against minorities is subconsciously tolerated by the majority. At this moment, their sense of justice will decline, and the majority will subconsciously see transgender groups as different from themselves, and such inaction will also lead to tragedy to a large extent.

But the difference is that Ludovic's relatives changed their minds in the end, and he also had open-minded friends by his side. He was lucky to integrate into the society while Gregor was rejected and died alone in the end. The starkly different outcomes of two transgenders demonstrate how powerful external reactions can be on an individual. Gregor's parents ended up treating him like an insect. The fact of transgender individuals was never accepted in their hearts. They forgot that Gregor was a real person and their own son. They didn't realize that there exists "family duty towards him commanded that they should swallow their disgust, and put up with him in patience, just put up with him" (Kafka 59). On the contrary, after the Ludovic family moved to a new place, they met another transgender, Christine, who is biologically female but self-identified as male. Christine's family has an open and inclusive attitude. Ludovic was forced to wear a dress by Christine at her birthday party, which caused his mother to be furious and even beat Ludovic. At this time, Christine's mother said that they were just changing clothes. This sentence wakes up Ludovic's relatives that dresses and make-up aren't the inherent property of the female gender. Then, Ludovic's mother said to Ludovic that "whatever happens, you'll always be my child" (Michèle Laroque), and his father also said that "do whatever feels best" (Jean-Philippe Écoffey). The ending of the film is Ludovic wearing a beautiful dress happily playing with a group of children together, which means that he was finally accepted by society, and also means that his inner female gender cognition has not been suppressed and disappeared.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, as transgender individuals, the different attitudes towards them lead to completely different endings. Transgenders also belong to this symbolic society and will be influenced profoundly by the outside world. Only when the public realize that gender is just an imitation of an idealized state and there's no gender as an origin will they break the inherent gender stereotype and use a more inclusive attitude to accept different gender identities and sexual orientations, then the occurrence of tragedies will be reduced.

References

- Alain Berlinerm (Director), (1997). *My Life in Pink*. Performances by Georges Du Fresne, Michèle Laroque, Jean-Philippe Écoffey, Julien Riviere, Raphaëlle Santini, Gregory Diallo, Erik Cazals De Fabel.
- Baidu Baike, (n.d.). "Transgender" Baidu Encyclopedia, 2022, baike.baidu.com/item/transgender/6234644?fromtitle=transgender & fromid=17582036&fr=Aladdin. Accessed 1 Dec. 2022.
- Butler, Judith, (2017). "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (from Gender Trouble). *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 3rd Ed. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Blackwell Publishing.
- Kafka, Franz, (2009). "The Metamorphosis" [Die Verwandlung/1915]. *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Trans. Joyce Crick. Oxford University Press.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).