

Contextualizing Gender
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Lecture - 22
21st Century Queer Fiction

Welcome dear participants. In the previous module we had looked at the elements of homo eroticism in literature beginning with ancient Greek poetry to the twentieth century novel. Today we shall discuss two major contemporary novels 'Middlesex' which was published in 2002 by Jeffrey Eugenides and 'The Line of Beauty' a 2004 novel by Alan Hollinghurst.


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Jeffrey Eugenides (1960-)

- American novelist and short story writer. He is currently Professor of Creative Writing at Princeton University.
- He is famous for his three major novels:
 - *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), *Middlesex* (2002), and *The Marriage Plot* (2011).
- Influence of modernist writers like James Joyce, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf.
 - Much of Eugenides' work is set in Detroit and it comes across in his novels with a sense of nostalgia. He claims that the suburbs of Detroit are often just as interesting as some of the other 'exotic' locations for a novel.



Jeffrey Eugenides
Source: The New Yorker



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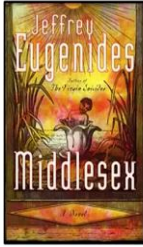
Jeffrey Eugenides is an American novelist and a short story writer. He is famous for his three major works 'The Virgin Suicides' published in 1993, 'Middlesex' published in 2002 and 'The Marriage Plot' published in 2011. He has been influenced by modernist writers like James Joyce, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf.

Eugenides also draws many elements from his past uses a rich vocabulary in his novels which is supplemented by unusual narrators ranging from the first-person plural, 'we' in 'The Virgin Suicides' to the omniscient and detached first person intersex narrator in Middlesex.


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Middlesex (2002)

- *Middlesex* is a Pulitzer Prize winning novel by Eugenides. It is his second novel; and tells the story of Cal or Calliope Stephanides, a hermaphrodite who is also the narrator of the novel.
 - Hermaphroditism is the condition of having both male and female reproductive organs.
 - In human beings, conditions that involve discrepancies between external genitalia and internal reproductive organs are described by the term 'intersex'.
- The novel is primarily a tragicomic family-chronicle of immigration and assimilation.



Source: Farrar, Straus and Giroux



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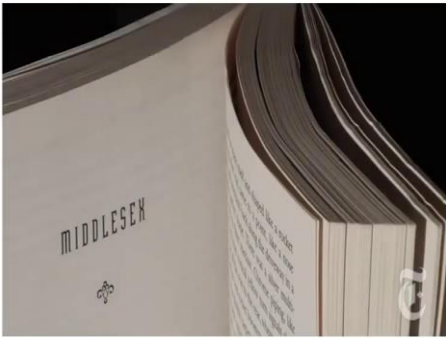
Middlesex is a Pulitzer Prize winning novel it is the second novel by Eugenides and tells the story of Cal or Calliope Stephanides, a hermaphrodite who is also the narrator of the novel. Hermaphroditism is the condition of having both male and female reproductive organs. In human beings, conditions that involve discrepancies between external genitalia and internal reproductive organs are described by the term 'intersex'.

The novel is primarily a tragicomic family chronicle of immigration and assimilation. Critics often feel that the novel has a hybrid genre in the plot as it is a Greek American family saga and also a picaresque coming-of-age novel. Some reviewers have noted that the book's amalgam of genres reflects the split nature of the narrator's body.

Eugenides also confirms this intention, in an interview in an American arts magazine 'BOMB' he says that like its hermaphroditic narrator the book was also meant to be a hybrid. Apart from the theme of gender 'Middlesex' also deals with ethnic identity hybridity and classical Greek motives while experimenting with the narrative voice.

Additionally, the exploration of the city of Detroit imparts an autobiographical touch to his work. Eugenides confesses that he has been influenced by Jewish writers such as Saul Bellow and Phillip Roth. Novels by these authors exhibited certain autobiographical elements while incorporating the nature of changing identity. In the rapidly modernizing post war American life of the twentieth century this combination had attracted the masses towards them.

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Eugenides on Autobiographical Elements

- Interview conducted by Sam Tanenhaus of The New York Times.
- Eugenides discusses his celebrated novels *The Virgin Suicides* and *Middlesex*, and the decline of his hometown, Detroit.

Source: [The New York Times \[YouTube\]](#)

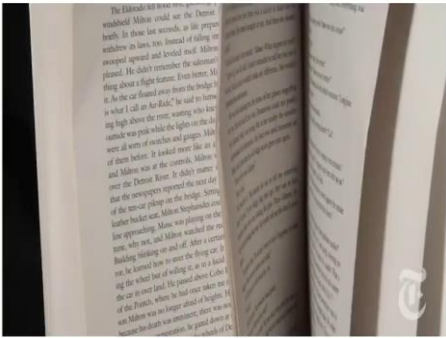
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In this slide we look an interview conducted by Sam Tanenhaus of the New York Times. Eugenides discusses his celebrated novels ‘The Virgin Suicides’ and ‘Middlesex’ and the decline of his hometown Detroit in this interview: One interesting question that comes up with your work is particularly in ‘Middlesex’ is you write a great deal about the immigrant experience.

It is the Greek American experience how many literary forebears did you have writing in this country doing the kind of fiction that you wanted to write. Absolutely none in terms of Greek forebears, I think probably the influences on my work are Jewish writers Bellow and Philip Roth and writers like that whose experience always rang true to me the idea of parents or grandparents from Europe perhaps not so, literate working very hard to give their kids a chance in America that all seemed very much like my own childhood.

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Eugenides on Autobiographical Elements


- Interview conducted by Sam Tanenhaus of The New York Times.
- Eugenides discusses his celebrated novels *The Virgin Suicides* and *Middlesex*, and the decline of his hometown, Detroit.

Source: [The New York Times \[YouTube\]](#)

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One character in both your first two novels different though they are in Detroit and its Suburbs some have said you are the laureate of Detroit. Every time I go back to Detroit you know there is this German word “Ruinenlust” which is the pleasure of ruins and the concept is that such you go to these places that are falling apart and they fill you with this kind of tragic sense of not just the place, but of life itself and that is what; that is what comes over me when I go to Detroit. My whole childhood that the city was just falling apart little by little and I was born in the city in 1960 and the riots happened in 67.

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Eugenides on Autobiographical Elements

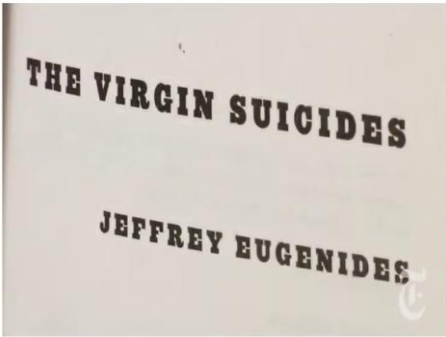
- Interview conducted by Sam Tanenhaus of The New York Times.
- Eugenides discusses his celebrated novels *The Virgin Suicides* and *Middlesex*, and the decline of his hometown, Detroit.

Source: [The New York Times \[YouTube\]](#)

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And after that just little by little you saw the city just getting shabbier and sort of crumbling, now what is happened is that it's just vanishing in large swaths they are bulldozing. So, much of the city about 30 to 40 percent of it is now empty land. So, that is what I notice when I go there is just my city and parts of it just being erased.

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The image shows the front cover of the book 'The Virgin Suicides' by Jeffrey Eugenides. The title is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font at the top, and the author's name is printed in a similar font below it. The background of the cover is a light, textured color.

Eugenides on
Autobiographical Elements

- Interview conducted by Sam Tanenhaus of The New York Times.
- Eugenides discusses his celebrated novels *The Virgin Suicides* and *Middlesex*, and the decline of his hometown, Detroit.

Source: [The New York Times \[YouTube\]](#)


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Generally, my work has gone from a preoccupation with language and I think 'The Virgin Suicides' represents that where it is really about the voice of the novel. 'Middlesex' was where I taught myself how to plot its extremely heavily over plotted novel the most. And now I am working on deeper characterization deeper psychological portraits of my characters. So, that is the trajectory my work is going on.

The interviewer points out that Eugenides writes extensively about the immigrant experience in his novel; however, *Middlesex* is not in autobiography.

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- Eugenides decided to write a novel with an intersex protagonist after reading the posthumously published 1980 memoir of Herculine Barbin, an intersex teenager who lived in the nineteenth century.
- He found it overly vague and wanted to create his own story. Because Eugenides wanted his intersex character to live in contemporary times, he used his own family history as an influence.
- The main plot is loosely based on the author's life and is inspired by his Greek heritage.
 - The first part focuses on Cal's family history which begins in 1922 in Greece. The narrator's grandparents are siblings who fall in love with each other after their parents' death, immigrate to Detroit and marry. It also describes the assimilation and upward mobility of his parents.




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Eugenides decided to write a novel with an intersex protagonist after reading the posthumously published 1980 memoir of Herculine Barbin, an intersex teenager who had lived in the nineteenth century. Eugenides found it overly vague and wanted to create his own story because he wanted his intersex character to live in contemporary times, he used his own family history as an influence. The main plot of the novel, thus, is loosely based on the author's life and is inspired by his Greek heritage.

The first part focuses on Cal's family history Cal who is the protagonist of this novel. So, his family history begins in 1922 in Greece. His grandparents are siblings who fall in love with each other after their parents' death, immigrate to Detroit and marry. It also describes the assimilation and upward mobility of his parents.

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- The family history enables us to trace the gene, which is passed on through inbreeding over generations, and causes Cal's unusual condition – 5-alpha-reductase deficiency. To understand why Calliope is not like other girls, she has to uncover a guilty family secret and the astonishing genetic history that turns Callie into Cal.
- Primarily a bildungsroman, the novel explores the themes of complex gender identity, nature, rebirth and the different ways through which men and women experience society.
- Calliope is born healthy, but the doctor, who delivers her, fails to notice that she is a hermaphrodite. In her childhood, she becomes close to a young girl Clementine. However, she realizes that she is different from other girls as she felt more than friendship with Clementine.



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The family history also enables us to trace the gene which is passed on through inbreeding over generations and has caused an unusual condition in Cal which is known as 5 alpha reductase deficiency. To understand why Calliope is not like other girls she has to uncover a guilty family secret and the astonishing genetic history that turns Callie into Cal.

Primarily a Bildungsroman, the novel also explores the themes of complex gender identity nature, rebirth and the different ways through which men and women experience society. Calliope is born healthy, but the doctor who delivers her fails to notice that she is a hermaphrodite. In her childhood she becomes close to a young girl Clementine; however, she realizes that she is different from other girls as she felt more than friendship with Clementine.

Calliope calls Clementine the obscure object and they begin a sexual relationship. However, the girl's brother finds about this relationship and assaults Calliope.

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- After the assault, Calliope was taken to the hospital where doctors finally discover that she has sex organs from both the genders.
- Calliope wants to continue living as a girl because she wants to be normal, but when she sees the report describing herself as genetically male, she understands the source of her confusion and runs away.
- Calliope cuts her hair, starts calling herself Cal, and transitions to male. He moves to San Francisco where he met other people like himself and begins to accept his identity.
- Cal goes to work for the Foreign Service in Berlin, and writes his memoir. He falls in love with a woman named Julie. He initially pushes her away before things get serious because he was worried about how she would react to the truth of his identity.
- Later he gets the courage to reveal his secret to her and she accepts him.



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Calliope cuts her hair starts calling herself Cal and transitions to male. He moves to San Francisco where he meets other people like himself and he also begins to accept his own identity and sexuality. Cal goes to work for the Foreign Service in Berlin and writes his memoir. He falls in love with a woman named Julie. Initially, Cal pushes her away before things get serious because he is worried about how she may react to the truth of his identity.

Later he gets the courage to reveal his secret to her and she accepts him. The book ends with Cal and Julie agreeing to give their relationship another try. Cal used the exercise of tracing his family history and examining the patterns he shared with his ancestors to come to terms with himself. This is what allowed him to begin an honest relationship with Julie.

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Biopolitics and Gender Resignification in *Middlesex*

- *Middlesex* provides an important cultural context for understanding the absence of intersex identity as a viable social formation.
- Critics argue that Julie's companionship is integral to Cal's performance of heterosexuality, and their union represents his memoir's happy conclusion.
- Eugenides's novel fuels a renewed conversation about the hermaphroditic body and its relation to the concept of biopolitics.
- Reflected in the formal structure of its split narration (Callie and Cal), this narrative shuttling between representations of social identity and the experience of biological body corresponds to what Michel Foucault describes as the disciplining effect of biopower.




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'Middlesex' provides an important cultural context for understanding the absence of intersex identity as a visible social formation. Critics argue that Julie's companionship is integral to Cal's performance of heterosexuality and their union represents the memoir's happy conclusion. This novel fuels a renewed conversation about the hermaphroditic body and its relation to the concept of biopolitics.

Reflected in the formal structure of its split narration, that is Callie and Cal, this narrative shuttling between representations of social identity in the experience of biological body corresponds to what Michel Foucault describes as the disciplining effect of biopower.

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- At the vexed intersection of the biological body and the political subject, biopolitics determine how identity categories are continually naturalized, deconstructed, or re-signified.
- This process of resignification is something that Butler highlights in her critical work *Gender Trouble* (1990).
- As a strategy to denaturalize and re-signify bodily categories, Butler proposes a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body. (Butler, 1990)
- But the biological body cannot be a stable referent to social processes of identification.




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As a strategy to denaturalize and re-signify bodily categories, Butler proposes a set of periodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body. But the biological body cannot be a stable referent to social processes of identification.

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- Cultural critic Rey Chow argues that ethnicity displays a unique biopolitical capacity because it offers individuals a mode of subjectivity that has “mythic potential” for imagining new forms of belonging.
- The non-reproductive sexuality of the novel’s narrator can also be reconceptualized as biopolitical, since his immigrant success story is founded equally on ethnic assimilation and intersex normalization.
- It is thus also a tale of ethnic assimilation because, the narrator’s cosmopolitan masculinity and his intersexed body are affirmed in the mirror of Julie’s Japanese ethnicity.
- Therefore, the hermaphrodite protagonist of *Eugenides* can be regarded as a figure embodying hybridity owing to the narrative’s historical settings and transnational contexts.



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Rey Chow argues that ethnicity displays a unique biopolitical capacity, because it offers individuals a mode of subjectivity that has mythic potential for imagining new forms of belonging. The non-reproductive sexuality of the novel’s narrator can also be reconceptualized as biopolitical. Since his immigrant success story is founded equally on ethnic assimilation and intersex normalization.

It is thus also a tale of ethnic assimilation because the narrator’s cosmopolitan masculinity and his intersex body are affirmed in the mirror of Julie’s Japanese ethnicity. Therefore, the hermaphrodite protagonist of *Eugenides* can be regarded as a figure embodying hybridity owing to the narrative’s historical settings and transnational contexts. Hence *Middlesex* can indeed claim the achievement of bringing ethnicity to the center of an intersex visibility project.

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Gender Identity and Sexual Categorization in *Middlesex*

- The novel primarily questions what gender options are available to a modern intersex individual.
- The famous opening line of the novel sets the key scenes of the story from the first-person perspective of the protagonist, and shows that Cal's indeterminate gender category is central to the plot.
 - I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smog less Detroit day in January 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August 1974. (3)



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The novel primarily questions what gender options are available to a modern intersex individual. The famous opening line of the novel sets the key scenes of the story from the first-person perspective of the protagonist and shows that Cal's indeterminate gender category is central to the plot. And I quote "I was born twice first as a baby girl on a remarkably smog less Detroit day in January 1960 and then again as a teenage boy in an emergency room near Petoskey Michigan in August 1974."

Cal's experience in the novel echoes the struggles of intersex individuals across history. By highlighting the vacillating nature of Cal's gender identity, the novel attempts to study the complex nature of sexual orientation and self-designed gender possibilities. In the novel Cal's parents also built a case of science versus culture.

They go to great troubles to scientifically ensure that they conceive only a baby girl, as the genetic mutation which is known as $5\alpha R2D$ is a rare condition affecting only males, but ultimately, they had a child who decided to live as their son.

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- In the novel, Cal's parents build a case of science vs. culture. The parents went to great trouble to scientifically conceive a baby girl but only to end up with someone who chose to live as their son.
- An existential and ethical dilemma was pointed out by Cal's mother Tessie:
 - To tamper with something as mysterious and miraculous as the birth of a child was an act of hubris. In the first place, Tessie didn't believe you could do it. Even if you could, she didn't believe you should try. (9)
- Here we see the obsession of Cal's father with science and the potential of moral dilemmas reflected in the ethics of his mother.
- Similarly, Cal's grandmother is tormented by guilt for her past sins throughout the novel, and keeps her own past incest a secret.




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We can also note an existential and ethical dilemma in the portrayal of Cal's mother Tessie. We can look at the obsession of Cal's father with science and the potential of moral dilemmas which are reflected in the ethics of his mother. Similarly, Cal's grandmother is tormented by guilt for her past sins throughout the novel and keeps her own past incest a secret.

The motive of secrets reappears in the novel when Cal attempts to hide his identity of being intersexed. This closeted state led him to break off several relationships with women he liked. This is something that Eve Sedgwick highlights with her conception of 'the closet'. She says that in sexually confused individuals it is a genuine fear that coming out of the closet or revealing one's secrets may result in oppression or social rejection.

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- Cal's family has kept several secrets in closet: e.g., Lina keeps her lesbian identity a secret from her husband Jimmy; the secret of incest between Desdemona and Lefty keeps them emotionally apart.
- Discussing his own life, Cal points out that the society views any form of intersex as abnormal and suggests medical alteration to submit to the normalized gender binary.
 - The biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling argues that we should unearth the discursive biases of gender science.
- The novel also underscores how medical sciences can be impacted by dominant cultural mores in their understanding of human body and its sexuality. The portrayal of Dr Peter Luce; a world-renowned specialist who studies the teenage Callie, elaborates on this idea.
- Homosexuality was considered a pathological sexual disorder in Dr. Luce's clinic, primarily because it was illegal in the US.
 - Relationships between people of the same sex was not legalized on a federal level in America until 2003.



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Cal's family has kept several secrets in a closet. For example, Lina keeps her lesbian identity a secret from her husband, the secret of incest between Desdemona and Lefty also keeps them emotionally apart. Discussing his own life, Cal points out that the society views any form of intersex is abnormal and suggests medical alteration to submit to the normalized gender binary. The biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling argues that we should unearth the discursive biases of gender science.

The novel also underscores how medical sciences can be impacted by dominant cultural mores in their understandings of human body and its sexuality. The portrayal of Dr. Peter Luce, a world-renowned specialist who studies the teenage Callie elaborates on this idea. Homosexuality was considered to be a pathological sexual disorder in Dr. Luce's clinic, primarily because it was illegal in the USA at that time. Relationships between people of the same sex were not legalized on a federal level in the US until 2003.


Dr. Luce treats Callie as more of a specimen for study than as a person forcing her to watch pornography and also bringing his colleagues to stare at her in vulnerable positions. His unwillingness to share information openly causes Callie to be suspicious of him.

Critics argue that Dr. Luce in the novel represents the infamous Dr. John Money who is specialized in the studies of sex reassignment surgery. The role of Dr. Money in

influencing the early conceptions of gender identity is critically explored by Judith Butler in her work 'Undoing Gender' which was published in 2004.

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- In the novel, Dr. Luce was insistent on locating Cal's 'true', essential fixed self, and the narrator shows that such a well-assembled unchanging whole is only fictional.
- *Middlesex* awards the reader the opportunity to be faced with our mainstream prejudices and (mis)understandings of the world.
- This also prompts the readers to ponder identity options of gender by being inclusive of the queer project and to think outside of heteronormative discourses.



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In this novel Dr. Luce was insistent on locating Cal's true essential fixed self and the narrator shows that such a well-assembled unchanging whole is only fictional. 'Middlesex' awards the reader the opportunity to be faced with our mainstream prejudices and misunderstandings of the world. This also prompts the readers to ponder identity options of gender by being inclusive of the queer project and to think outside of heteronormative discourses.

Intersex today is accepted as a natural condition that may occur. The advancement in science will challenge many fears surrounding seemingly unintelligible forms of sex, but importantly queer novels such as 'Middlesex' normalize the alienness and difficulties of self-definition faced by individuals such as Cal who deviate from the norm. Such tales of emancipatory struggles will help to inspire numerous ways in which similar invisible boundaries of gender can be negotiated. The second novel we are examining in this module is 'The Line of Beauty' by Alan Hollinghurst.


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Alan Hollinghurst (1954 -)

- Alan Hollinghurst is an English novelist, short story writer, poet and translator.
 - While studying at Oxford, he shared a house with the future poet laureate Andrew Motion. He also wrote a thesis on the works of three gay writers - Ronald Firbank, E. M. Forster and L. P. Hartley. He identifies himself as openly gay.
- His novel, *The Line of Beauty* (2004), traces a decade of change and tragedy and won the 2004 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. It was adapted for BBC Television by Andrew Davies in 2006.
 - His next novel *The Stranger's Child* (2011) was longlisted for Booker Prize in 2011.



Alan Hollinghurst
Source: Geoffrey Swaine




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Alan Hollinghurst is an English novelist, short story writer and a translator as well as a poet. His novel ‘The Line of Beauty’ which was published in 2004 traces a decade of change and tragedy and also won the 2004 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. It was adapted for BBC Television by Andrew Davies in 2006. His next novel ‘The Stranger’s Child’ published in 2011 was also long listed for Booker Prize in that year.

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- His first novel *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988), was a celebration of the thriving gay subculture of city life that he discovered when he moved to London in his twenties.
- But later -novels, including *The Folding Star* (1994) and *The Stranger's Child* (2011), are pastoral reveries that gesture back to his semi-rural English childhood.
- He has written six novels. His sixth novel *The Sparsholt Affair* (2017) explores the changing attitudes towards homosexuality in England – spanning the seven transformative decades from the 1940s to the present.
- He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 1989 Somerset Maugham Award, the 1994 James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the 2004 Booker Prize.



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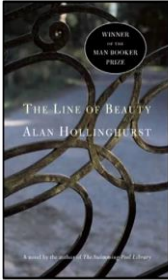
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The Line of Beauty


- *The Line of Beauty* is a historical novel published in 2004.
- The story takes place between 1983 and 1987, though the plot does not follow a linear path.
- The title of the book refers to the “line of beauty”, a term or theory used in arts and aesthetics to describe an S-shaped curved/serpentine line, appearing within an object.
 - S-shaped curved lines signify liveliness and activity, and excite the attention of the viewer as contrasted with straight lines.



- William Hogarth, in his 1753 book *The Analysis of Beauty*, has described how beauty itself is embodied in this shape.



Source: Bloomsbury USA



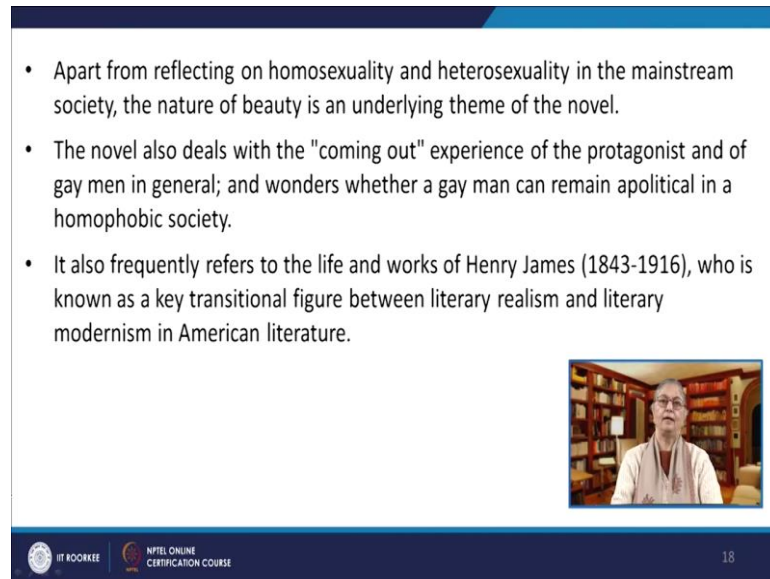
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It is a historical novel and the story takes place between 1983 and 1987 though the plot does not follow a linear path. The title of the book refers to “The Line of Beauty” which is a term of theory used in arts and aesthetics to describe an S-shaped curved or serpentine line which might appear within an object or an artwork. These curved lines signify liveliness and activity and excite the attention of the viewer as contrasted with straight lines.

William Hogarth in his 1753 book ‘The Analysis of Beauty’, has described how beauty itself is embodied in this shape. The protagonist of the novel uses this phrase to describe the beauty of a character he admires. The book touches upon the emergence of HIV

AIDS as well as the relationship between politics and homosexuality and its ambivalent acceptance in the 1980s.

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- Apart from reflecting on homosexuality and heterosexuality in the mainstream society, the nature of beauty is an underlying theme of the novel.
- The novel also deals with the "coming out" experience of the protagonist and of gay men in general; and wonders whether a gay man can remain apolitical in a homophobic society.
- It also frequently refers to the life and works of Henry James (1843-1916), who is known as a key transitional figure between literary realism and literary modernism in American literature.

Apart from reflecting on homosexuality and heterosexuality in the mainstream society the nature of beauty is also an underlying theme of the novel. It deals with the coming out experience of the protagonist and of gay men in general and wonders whether a gay man can remain apolitical in a homophobic society. This novel also frequently refers to the life and works of Henry James who is known as a key transitional figure between literary realism and literary modernism in American literature.

The famous critic Eve Sedgwick had contributed to Jameson scholarship by exploring him as a homosexual writer who had kept his identity a secret in his art. After Sedgwick's research, Henry James has appeared in several contemporary gay novels which explored the manifestations of latent homosexuality.

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- Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* is set in the underground gay scene of the early 1980s.
 - This era was known for its urban club culture, gay civil rights protests, and panic about the AIDS crisis. This was also seen as a time of political uncertainty in Britain as conservatives had elected Margaret Thatcher into office.
- Nick Guest is the 20-year-old protagonist of the novel. After graduating from Oxford, he moves into the home of his classmate Toby, who has to take care of his sister Catherine suffering from manic depression.
- Nick is a homosexual who has only been open about his sexuality since his final year at Oxford. He fantasizes about his friend Toby but would never act upon his longings. His first sexual encounter was with Leo, whom he met through a personal ad.
- The story abruptly shifts forward to 1986 where Nick is now a confident young man, embracing his homosexuality.



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Hollinghurst's novel is set in the underground gay scene of the early 1980s an era which was known for its urban club culture, gay civil rights protests and panic about the AIDS crisis. This was also seen as a time of political uncertainty in Britain as conservatives had elected Margaret Thatcher into office.


The plot revolves around Nick Guest a 20-year-old protagonist of the novel. After graduating from Oxford, he had moved into the home of his classmate Toby who had to take care of his sister Catherine who was suffering from manic depression. Nick is a homosexual who has only been open about his sexuality since his final year at Oxford. He fantasizes about his friend Toby, but would never act upon his longings. His first sexual encounter was with Leo whom he met through a personal ad.

The story abruptly shifts forward to 1986 where Nick is now a confident young man and embracing his homosexuality openly. In 1986 a larger part of the society did not approve of same-sex relations. Acidic minded and consciously pretentious scholar Nick tries new ways of searching for his own identity. As a PhD candidate he makes only a little progress in his thesis about Henry James and his fast-losing interest in research.

He goes through a series of casual relationships and even tries drugs, but he did not have a feeling of belongingness in the society he lived in.

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- During the celebration of Toby's 21st birthday, Nick meets Toby's friend Antoine Wani, a glamorous 'closeted' gay Lebanese millionaire, who also has a female fiancée.
 - Impressed by Wani, Nick starts a production company with him to publish a luxury magazine "Ogee", taking the name from 18th century English painter William Hogarth who used the term to refer to "the line of beauty". Hogarth believed that this shape was paramount to the aesthetic study of what makes things beautiful.
- Nick and Wani fall in love with each other, but keep their relationship secret. However it is revealed when Toby's sister Catherine found out about them and exposed it publicly.
- Meanwhile, Toby's father Gerald was an elected Minister and an admirer of Margaret Thatcher. But during the 1987 election, Gerald was named in a corruption scandal.
- The press also releases a story on Nick and Wani, leading to a greater scandal.



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During the celebration of Toby's 21st birthday, Nick meets Toby's friend Antoine Wani a glamorous, but closeted gay Lebanese millionaire who also has a female fiancée to keep up the social pretense. Impressed by Wani Nick starts a production company with him ostensibly they are publishing a luxury magazine titled Ogee and they have taken the title from the 18th century English painter William Hogarth who used the term to refer to the line of beauty.


Hogarth believed that this shape was paramount to the aesthetic study of what makes things beautiful. Nick and Wani fall in love with each other, but keep their relationship a secret; however, it is accidentally revealed when Toby's sister Catherine found out about them and exposed it publicly. Meanwhile Toby's father Gerald was an elected minister and also an admirer of Thatcher, but during the 1987 election he was named in a corruption scandal.

The press also releases a story on Nick and Wani leading to a greater scandal for Gerald. The revelation of homosexual affair of Nick who was staying at Toby's home forced Toby's father Gerald to resign his position as minister. He tries to use Nick as a scapegoat for his own grossly irresponsible lifestyle.

Nick moves out after Gerald accuses him of attaching himself to the family and then wrecking them because of his homosexuality.

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- Nick goes to live with Wani and views the first and final issue of *Ogee*.
- After a short period of living together, it is anecdotally revealed that Wani is dying of a terminal illness assumed to be AIDS.
- The book ends with Nick musing on his HIV test that he is going to have the next day and imagining that the results will be positive.
- Though occasionally humorous in content, the grim fates of various characters reflect the impact of social conditioning on the 1980s Britain.



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Nick goes to live with Wani and views the first and final issue of *Ogee*. After a short period of living together it is anecdotally revealed that Wani is dying of a terminal illness assumed to be AIDS this was a disease about which not much was known in 1980s. The book ends with Nick musing on his HIV test that he is going to have the next day and imagining that the results would be positive.

Though occasionally humorous in content the grim fates of various characters reflect the impact of social conditioning on the 1980s Britain. The ambiguity of its characters fates reflects the author's ambivalence about whether homosexual men and women receive viable options to live in contemporary society with freedom and dignity.

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Queer Desire and Realist Aesthetics in *The Line of Beauty*

- Critical appraisals of *The Line of Beauty* mostly emphasize the novel's form, its prioritization of aesthetics, and the intersecting lines of identity against the backdrop of the novel's historical setting.
- The formal features of the novel offer a way to view both the historical and political elements of its 1980s narrative, and also imbue the text with certain affective structures.
- Hollinghurst's return to a specific kind of formal literary realism remains intertwined within his treatments of sexuality.
- The strategy of narrative integrity in the novel evokes the interpersonal relations in an evasive and indirect fashion.



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Critical appraisals of 'The Line of Beauty' mostly emphasize the novel's form its prioritization of aesthetics and the intersecting lines of identity against the backdrop of the novel's historical setting. The formal features of the novel offer a way to view both the historical and political elements of its 1980s narrative and also imbue the text with certain affective structures.

Hollinghurst's return to a specific kind of formal literary realism remains intertwined within his treatments of sexuality. The strategy of narrative integrity in the novel evokes the interpersonal relations in an evasive and indirect fashion. Hollinghurst's literary enterprise and narrative technique can be characterized as a willful and deliberate approach to incorporate a homocentric perspective on the novels charter.


His formal strategy to dedicate the narrative is specifically to exploring gay sexuality constructs the novel as a site of multiple ambivalences.

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- The novel is divided into three parts:
 1. "The Love Chord" (1983)
 2. "To Whom Do You Beautifully Belong?" (1986)
 3. "The End of the Street" (1987)
- The title of the second part is taken from the American novelist Henry James.
- The initial situation of the novel reminds us of the prose of Henry James, where Nick finds himself in upper class social circle and is fascinated by its elegance.
- Frequent references to Henry James in the narrative, reveal how important he is in the world of the novel's characters.



Henry James
Source: John Sargent, 1913.



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The novel is divided into three parts; the first is known as “The Love Chord”, the second is “To Whom Do You Beautifully Belong” and the third is “The End of the Street”. The title of the second part is taken from the American novelist Henry James. The initial situation of the novel reminds us of the prose of Henry James where Nick finds himself in upper class social circle and is fascinated by its elegance.

Frequent references to Henry James in the narrative reveal how important he is in the world of the novels characters. Critics also note that the novel as a whole can be read as a Jamesian psychological inquiry interlaced with a coming-of-age queer story in the Thatcher era of 1980s Britain.

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- Apart from Henry James, some commonality with Oscar Wilde can also be located in the narrative.*
- For instance, Hollinghurst's protagonist combines aestheticism in art with untraditional sexual orientation in life.
- Ambitious striving to affirm priority of art before life can be correlated with a challenge to common moral standards, is more likely to be associated with Wilde. Hollinghurst expresses this approach with an exploration of erotic desire.
- According to Julie Rivkin, there is an inseparability of capitalist elements, politics and aesthetic pleasure within plot of *The Line of Beauty*. (Rivkin, 2005)

* Olga Antsyferova. (2008). Aestheticism Revisited: "The Line of Beauty" by Allan Hollinghurst. In book *The Novel in English at the Start of the Twenty-First Century: Recontextualizing the Tradition*.




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Apart from Henry James, some commonality with Oscar Wilde can also be located in the narrative. For instance, Hollinghurst's protagonist combines aestheticism in art with untraditional sexual orientation in life. Ambitious striving to affirm priority of art before life can be correlated with a challenge to common moral standards and it is more likely to be associated with Wilde. Hollinghurst expresses this approach with an exploration of erotic desire.

According to Julie Rivkin, there is an inseparability of capitalist elements politics and aesthetic pleasure within plot of 'The Line of Beauty'. Descriptions of queer desire can be found in the early part of the novel where the narration explicates Nick's affection for Toby.

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- Regarding Nick's love for Toby, who is heterosexual, that narrator says:
 - His heart was given to Toby, with whom flirting would have been inappropriate, almost sacrilegious. He wasn't quite ready to accept that if he was going to have a lover, it wouldn't be Toby, or any other drunk straight boy hopping the fence, it would be a gay lover. (Hollingshurst 24)
- The structures of this passage remain occupied with the perpetual possibility of a fantasy.
- Nick's heart "was given to Toby"—a passive phrasing which strips away agency and choice; a desire for an impossible love and this constitutes the reality of Nick's early life.




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Regarding Nick's love for Toby who is heterosexual the narrator says and I quote his heart was given to Toby with whom flirting would have been inappropriate almost sacrilegious. He was not quite ready to accept that if he was going to have a lover it would not be Toby or any other drunk straight boy hopping the fence it would be a gay lover.

The structures of this passage remain occupied with the perpetual possibility of a fantasy. Nick's heart was given to Toby a passive phrasing which strips away agency and choice a desire for an impossible love and this constitutes the reality of Nick's early life. Nick's fantasy of autonomy and choice in the matter of love finds its limit in Toby's heterosexuality, but he propagates the fantasy through a queer case.

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- The affective structures which govern the novel's conceptions of gay possibility remain conditioned by a certain impossibility.
- For young Nick, gayness functioned as a site of compromise, as an incomplete or corroded mode of desire, even though characters like Leo and Wani, who reciprocated Nick's love, the novel renders conditions for the possibility of queer love. Still, Nick's affair with Wani remains insulated within the closet.
- Nick was not comfortable with the closeted nature of his relationship, and the novel slowly descends into increasingly tragic affect; amplifying its return to literary realism and deconstruction of queer utopic fantasies.



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The effective structures which govern the novel's conceptions of gay possibility remain conditioned by a certain impossibility. For young Nick, gayness functioned as a site of compromise as an incomplete or corroded mode of desire even though characters like Leo and Wani who reciprocated Nick's love the novel renders conditions for the possibility of queer love.

Still, Nick's affair with Wani remains insulated within the closet. Nick was not comfortable with the closeted nature of his relationship. And the novel slowly descends into increasingly tragic effect amplifying its return to literary realism and deconstruction of queer utopic fantasies.

The self reflexive prose that Hollinghurst uses in later half of the novel exposes the tension between Nick's homosexual relation with Wani and the realities of race, class and gender positionalities.

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- Furthermore, in a queered bildungsroman, Nick's 'guest position' embodies an ethical deconstruction of masculine subjectivity. His surname 'Guest' embodies liminality and otherness – like that of an outsider, and alludes to his ambiguous status as a tolerated interloper.
- By framing Nick as a fundamentally liminal figure—the gay, middle-class 'guest' of Tory Aristocracy, he represents elements of both transgression and conformity.
- At the end of the book Nick is shown in a state of complete frustration -- being driven out of Toby's home after a scandal and losing his friends to AIDS.
- In his 2005 interview Hollinghurst said that *The Line of Beauty* was "a book about decadence. It is about the lure of the aesthetic life, but also its dangers."
(Hollinghurst, 2005)



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Furthermore, in a queered Bildungsroman, Nick's 'guest' position embodies an ethical deconstruction of masculine subjectivity. His surname "Guest" embodies liminality and otherness like that of an outsider and alludes to his ambiguous status as a tolerated interloper.


By framing Nick as a fundamentally liminal figure, the gay middle-class 'guest' of a Tory Aristocracy, he represents elements of both transgression and conformity. At the end of the book, Nick is shown in a state of complete frustration being driven out of Toby's home after his scandal and losing his friends to AIDS.

In his 2005 interview, Hollinghurst said that 'The Line of Beauty' was "a book about decadence. It is about the lure of the aesthetic life, but also its dangers." Hollinghurst does not shy away from emphasizing the temporal limitations of gay reality and possibility in the 1980s.

Nick necessarily 'survives' the novel while Leo his first lover dies to AIDS and Wani gets textually erased in a manner similar to that of Leo. The novel ends with Nick admiring the beauty of the street corner. This appreciation of beauty in the world amidst chaos shows hope and possibility in the future, highlighting Nick's brave and unfettered character in his quest for love and passion.

After its tremendous success, the novel was adapted into a three-part television show which was broadcast by the BBC in 2006. The adaptation fared well among the critics and its storytelling method brought the novel alive in the visual media. In the next slide we have the promo of the TV adaptation.

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The Line of Beauty:
TV Adaption


- This video shows a promo for the Television adaption based on Hollinghurst's novel. The three-part television serial was broadcasted on BBC in 2006.
- It was directed by Saul Dibb and the screenplay was written by Andrew Davis.

Source: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

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It all seemed so beautiful back then. The lovers we had, the freedom we found - anything could happen and everything was possible.

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Source: British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)


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We all did things we were not proud of. Things we would come to regret, but I ask you this if you were me, where would you have drawn the line? Adapted by Andrew Davis, 'The Line of Beauty'.


The screenplay was written by Andrew Davis, a Welsh writer who has also written a screenplays for famous serialized BBC TV adaptations of works like 'Vanity Fair', 'Pride and Prejudice', 'Middlemarch' and 'War and Peace'.

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- The lead role of Nicholas Guest is played by the English actor Dan Stevens. He first drew international attention for his role as Matthew Crawley in the acclaimed period drama series *Downton Abbey*.
- The cinematic depiction of Hollinghurst's novel demonstrates class differences, hypocrisies and homophobia.
- The director contrasts the glamorous aura of 1980s England with a lucid and sensitive eye for revealing corruption, and fractured human relationships and gender expressions.
- The show also gives special attention to the costumes worn by the characters to accurately represent the period.



Source: BBC



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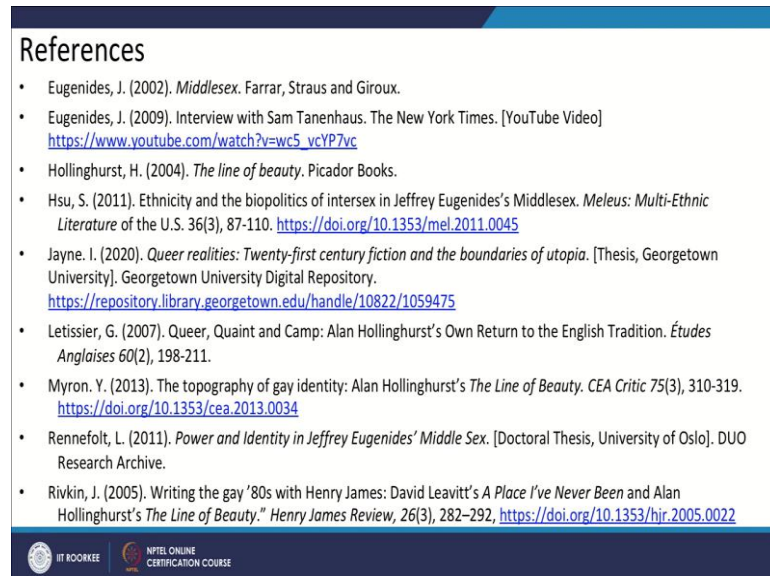
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The lead role of Nicholas Guest is played by the English actor Dan Stevens. He had first drawn international attention for his role as Matthew Crawley in the acclaimed period drama series 'Downton Abbey'. The cinematic depiction of Hollinghurst's novel demonstrates class differences, hypocrisies, and homophobia. The director contrasts the glamorous aura of 1980s England with a lucid and sensitive eye for revealing corruption and fractured human relationships and gender expressions.

The show also gives a special attention to the costumes worn by characters to accurately represent the period. With the depictions of inter ethnic relations sexual liaisons and the specter of AIDS the TV adaptation captures both the complexities of privileged and social groups and the illicit world of sexual depression. This shows the impact that queer literature can have when adapted to a movie or television.

In the coming modules, we will be looking at some of the select movies exploring the theme of queer sexuality.

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Thank you.